IT'S JUST WHO I AM: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE ~~DEVELOPMENT~~ EMERGENCE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

Culturally Responsive School Leadership is one of the most essential elements of the academic and longitudinal success of minoritized students from urban hyper-ghettoized communities. Despite the impact of Culturally Responsive School Leadership, the focus on improving learning has centered teachers instead of their leaders. Upon this realization, this study set out to center the Culturally Responsive School Leader, their context within the landscape of leadership and education, the history of Black Americans, and the frameworks of cultural and social capital as critical to the manner in which Culturally Responsive School Leaders engage with their students, families, communities, and the educational institution.

This study interviewed twelve school leaders from a large urban school district and its adjacent school districts about their journey to school leadership, their understandings of cultural capital, and how they performed their roles and responsibilities in light of their perceptions of cultural capital and their journey to school leadership. Participants consistently revealed a chronology of events throughout their lives that set them on the path of education and educational leadership that detailed them being Culturally Responsive, becoming a School Leader, and doing Culturally Responsive School Leadership. They would also suggest that Culturally Responsive School Leaders emerge; they are not developed, they connect in authentic ways to those they serve, and

they rectify, not repair, the harm executed against minoritized communities through their position as school leader.

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PREFACE

I must start this dissertation by suggesting that you probably shouldn't be reading this. While I have labored for nearly five years on this piece, it serves as a graduation requirement and a signifier of my intellectual acuity. Only those committed to the anti-oppression and anti-racism of public schools located within hyper-ghettoized urban communities should continue reading beyond this point. This study centers Culturally Responsive School Leaders and sheds light on their development as double agents, working against the institutions that employ them. If we are not careful, the information herein could allow hegemonic institutions to adjust and bolster their strategies of oppression and racism against Black children, families, and communities and the school leaders that broker safe spaces for them before we can make a difference. I can not allow that. In fact, I have considered deleting every word I have typed thus far to ensure its protection; but these words need to be read, and these stories need to be shared; Black Educational Thriving depends on it.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"We must struggle together not only to reimagine schools but to build new schools that we are taught to believe are impossible: schools based on intersectional justice, antiracism, love, healing, and joy" (Love, 2019, p. 11). Love's words are a charge to schools where Black students attend. Love's words are a call to action for education that is appropriate and responsive to the identities and needs of Black children who historically have been excluded from receiving a quality education. Love's words level a critique to educators who intend to care but whose students do not feel cared for. Love's words are a demand for Black students to matter in education.

To matter, we must reconcile our past. In June 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote an article for The Atlantic magazine called *The Case for Reparations.* In it, Coates poignantly states, "Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, the United States will never be whole" (Coates, 2014). In 1939, Cornelius Holmes, a formerly enslaved African, said, "Though the slavery question is settled, its impact is not. The question will be with us always. It is in

our politics, our courts, on our highways, in our manners, and our thoughts all day, every day" (Bunch, 2014). Black folx in the United States have suffered under debilitating circumstances since the first arrival of enslaved Africans in the bellows of slave ships in the 1600s.

As a Black educator, I know the complexity of forging a path to racial equity and equality. This path is conscious of historical, systemic, and systematic oppression but simultaneously attuned to the varied responses to that oppression performed by Black communities. In the United States, a racist Black-White gap exists in virtually all facets of society, including education, but education may be the key to unlocking a better future.

In this chapter, I will begin by discussing the purpose of this research study and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks from which it emerges. Then, I will discuss the methodology of this study. Finally, I will discuss what problem this study seeks to investigate as well as why this study is essential.

Purpose of the Study

The Miseducation of Black Youth results from racism and oppression and is facilitated by public educational institutions and the institutional agents they employ distributing cultural capital to the Black students, families, and communities they pretend to serve. The purpose of this study is to explore the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders as they set out to right the wrongs of generations of the Miseducation of Black Youth. To achieve this purpose, this study will examine the histories of Culturally Responsive School Leaders and the ways these school leaders fulfill their duties and responsibilities at the top of their respective schools.

As an educator of Black students, a former Black student, and parent to Black students, eradicating this plaguing ailment of urban education is the quintessential purpose of this research study and my life's work. The persistence of cultural mismatch between students and educators resulting in cultural deficit mentalities has proven to be a significant contributor to the experiences and performances of Black students. While creating cultural matches by changing student populations and shifting hiring practices might seem logical, such a solution would be full of legal implications and barriers. A more reasonable solution is addressing cultural deficit mentalities directly through the placement of Culturally Responsive School Leaders at the helm of public schools so that they might shape how cultural capital impacts the educational experiences of Black students in hyper-ghettoized urban communities. Culturally Responsive School Leaders are positioned to initiate transcendent change by how they serve hyper-ghettoized urban communities, unconventionally build trust, and charter sustainable school reform (Voohis & Sheldon, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is built upon the theoretical framework of the Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory centers its critical inquiry on racism. As it relates to this dissertation, racism will be framed using Sharfer's (2000) idealistic perspective specific to the relationship between Black and White people in the United States, now referred to as anti-Black Racism. At the core of Anti-Black racism is the belief that the White race is superior to the Black race, and this belief dominates systems, structures, institutions, and relationships in the United States (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Gould, 1981; Selden, 1994; Sharfer, 2000; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

According to Calmore (1992), arguably the first researcher to coin the term *critical race theory*, Critical Race Theory is generally understood as a form of oppositional scholarship that challenges the universality of White experiences and judgments as the authoritative standard to which all people are bound. As an oppositional scholarship, Critical Race Theory has a history of challenging the measures, controls, and regulations of thought, expression, presentation, and behavior (Calmore, 1992). Critical Race Theory flowed from the legal scholarship on the pervasive implications of race in the legal and justice systems in the 1960s and the failures of the civil rights litigations in the 1980s. Responding to the perceived failings of civil rights litigation of the 80s, Critical Race Theory formalized and operationalized three premises in the 1990s based on three tenets about White Supremacy that fuel Racism: racism is pervasive, racism is permanent, and racism must be challenged (Bell, 1992; Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lyn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002; Tate, 1997).

Racism is Pervasive and Permanent

Racism is pervasive and, therefore, permanent because it has been refined, codified, and repackaged in various ways throughout history; as such, identifying it has become more complex. Benedict (1959) defined racism as "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority, and another group is destined to congenital superiority" (p. 87). In 1970, Patricia Bidol-Padva defined racism as prejudice plus power. In 1976, Chesler defined racism as "an ideology of explicit or implicit superiority or advantage of one racial group over another, plus the institutional power to implement the ideology in social operations" (p. 22). In 1978, Wilson defined racism as

"the norms or ideologies of racial domination that reinforce or regulate patterns of racial inequality" (p. 9). In 1990, Schaefer defined racism as "a doctrine of racial supremacy; that one race is superior" (p. 16). In 2019, Ibram Kendi described racism as "a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produce and normalize racial inequalities" (p. 17).

This continually shifting definition of racism- from very explicitly stated social caste systems to a doctrine or beliefs of supremacy captures the mobility of racism to adjust to different cultures and times. Individuals identified as Black and White are not merely labeled but receive or are denied benefits and rights in economic, educational, judicial, political, and health institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 1994).

Whiteness. At the center of Anti-Black racism's pervasiveness is Whiteness. Takaki (1990) calls Whiteness the system of oppression that undergirded the seizure and appropriation of Black labor through a racial conception of property. Harris (1993) considers Whiteness a conceptual basis for power relationships in which the subordination of People of color accompanies the dominance of White people. Whiteness also creates expectations of power and control that maintained White privilege and domination by providing Whites with exclusive rights to freedom, the enjoyment of certain privileges, and special abilities to draw advantages from Whiteness (Harris, 1993). Historically, some of these freedoms, privileges, and advantages included essential liberty and freedom from enslavement, whether one could vote, travel freely, attend schools of their choice, work in an industry of their choosing, pursue a quality education, and obtain fair and equitable treatment by the legal, judicial, and law enforcement community. These Whiteness-imbued freedoms, privileges, and advantages still exist today.

Blackness. The only valid explanation for what it means to be Black is to be part of a collection of individuals who have suffered from a common disaster, share a common history, a long memory of the social heritage of slavery, and wear their skin tone as a badge, sign, or marker of their sociohistorical selves (Hall, 2017). Black, as a race, is a social construct, but one with serious material consequences. To be Black is to be inexplicably tied to White counterparts. The making of this bond between counterparts, one of submission and domination, superiority, and inferiority, hegemonically controls the discourse on race and racism. Consequently, this badge, sign, marker, and bond prohibits Black folx from certain freedoms, privileges, and advantages while simultaneously burdening, oppressing, dehumanizing, and mobilizing them.

Science. Another aspect of racism's pervasiveness is the utilization of science presented as objective and credible to support socially constructive subjective assertions. In Stephen Jay Gould's 1981 text *Mis-Measure of Man,* Gould captures the errors of bio determinism and reductionism that have been used to elevate the White race and degrade the Black race. Gould says, "...few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope…[are] by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within" (p. 60).

In the 19th century, phrenology and craniology, the studies of head shapes and sizes to identify specific characteristics and abilities, were used to establish intellectual hierarchies. In the 20th century, phrenology and craniology were replaced by intelligence exams (Gould, 1981). Despite the unproven arguments of causation between head shapes and sizes with characteristics and abilities and the ignored correlation of poverty with performance on intelligence exams and high-stakes standardized exams, science has and

continues to be an unrelenting excuse for racism. As Roediger (1999) explains: the most shocking aspect of racism is not just that it is presently oppressive and false, but that oppression and falsity are all that racism is.

Racism must be challenged

Su (2007) suggests that Critical Race theorists and scholars critically examine the status quo's daily and routine practices, patterns, and products while fighting racial justice. They do this by addressing the conditions in which Black families, communities, and, most importantly, students find themselves (Barnes, 1990). While majoritarian stories coalesce presuppositions, perceived wisdom, and cultural understandings to maintain positions of privilege and power for Whites, Critical Race Theory employs the counter-story to challenge racism. While majoritarian story-telling ignores and minimizes the lived experiences of minoritized citizens, Critical Race Theory deems the lived experiences of those racialized people as valuable, legitimate, and appropriate. The counter-story is the tool that challenges majoritarian stories through critical analysis and exposure (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In the telling of counterstories, deep and lasting wounds are exposed. From the telling of counterstories, solidarity is produced, and from solidarity, social change emanates. According to DeCuir & Dixson (2004), in this process, solidarity is bred from the rising voices of historically minoritized people in attempts to disrupt and condemn perpetual racial stereotypes.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory directly influences how this study progresses to the conceptual framework—Wilson's structural and cultural forces. According to Wilson (2009), structural forces "refers to the way social positions, social roles, and networks of social relationships are arranged in our institutions, such as the economy, polity, education, and organization of the family" (p. 4). Structural forces are broken down into two categories - social acts and social processes. Social acts are the behaviors of individuals within a society. Social processes are the mechanisms society erects to promote the relationships among members. Four structural forces will be discussed here—segregation, discipline, testing, and divestment.

Segregation

Before 1954, separate but equal permitted legal segregation of educational services, facilities, and public transportation. However, after 1954, separate but equal as established and affirmed by *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the 14th amendment were overruled and reinterpreted by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (hereafter referred to as *Brown I*). In *Brown I*, the court declared that the educational segregation of Black and White children had detrimental social, emotional, and motivational effects on Black children and that these damaging effects created state-sanctioned inferiority to the hearts and minds of Black children. Consequently, the court declared separate educational facilities inherently unequal and no longer acceptable (Thompson-Dorsey, 2013).

Despite the federal declaration in the 1955 ruling, often referred to as *Brown II*, school districts were given the authority and autonomy over the timeline and pace at which desegregation would unfold. Hence, desegregation spread incredibly slowly,

especially in the South. According to Orfield and Lee(2007), in 1954, less than one percent of Black students attended predominantly White schools. This percentage peaked in 1988 when roughly 43% of Black children attended predominantly White schools but began to decrease. By the year 2005, 27% of Black youths in the South attended predominantly White schools.

As the location of educational services changed for many Black students, so did the populations of those locations. As Black children started pouring into previously White-only schools, the White children left these schools in masses. This mass exodus was known as White flight, where increases in White private and suburban school enrollment, residential segregation patterns, court decisions that ended federal oversight of segregated districts, and school choice were employed to circumvent desegregation. These factors coalesced and contributed to the decline in the percentage of Black students attending majority White schools (Orfield & Lee, 2007) because White students were leaving their schools faster than Black students were entering. And as they went, they took resources with them.

Divestment

When the exodus of wealthier, White families who could leave the schools and communities happened, an economically homogenized remnant of students remained. When economic disadvantage combined with school funding based on community wealth, the product was state-sanction divestment, similar to the state-sanctioned segregation before.

In Ferguson (1991), an equity study of Texas schools found that primary inequity in schools resulted from teacher quality and that higher average socioeconomic status

districts can attract teachers with more persuasive skills and experiences than lower average socioeconomic school districts (Ferguson, 1991). Grissmer et al. (2000) conducted a study and found that achievement across schools, communities, and states differ partly because of the social capital of those across the schools, districts, and states. Wealthier and more educated neighborhoods have higher per-pupil spending and smaller class sizes, contributing significantly to student achievement. In a Southern Educational Foundation (2009) study, districts with high poverty were found to receive less per-pupil funding than districts with low poverty, directly impacting the likelihood of students performing proficient or better on assessments. In 2011, a New York study of one hundred districts found that socioeconomic status was generally predictive of student outcomes, including graduation rate, test scores, and four-year college attendance (Bruno, 2011).

Brisport (2013) reintroduced race into the equation when she asserted that as a result of segregation, Black families were only able to find living arrangements in undesirable neighborhoods. The undesirable areas then had imaginary zoning lines drawn around them that would exempt them from the financial resources needed to succeed. Nolan (2011) echoes Brisport asserting that when emancipated Blacks moved north in pursuit of freedom, safety, and success following the Emancipation Proclamation, they did what most ethnic groups do upon moving to a new area-they settled together in a central location. However, unlike other ethnic groups that slowly moved beyond their original home, Black families remained in the urban ghettos where they settled. They stayed where they decided for two reasons-fear of racial violence, red-lining, and restrictive covenants. Fleeing the Jim Crow South, many Black individuals stuck together

out of the habit that had built from fear and anti-Black White Supremacy. Black families also were prohibited from moving due to restrictive mortgaging policies that resulted in red-lining and the attack of those who tried to help them move (Rothstein, 2017). According to Ewing (2018), in Chicago, from 1917-1921, fifty-eight bombs struck the homes of Black families and anyone who helped them obtain mortgages or property.

Prohibited from homeownership, one of the most basic wealth-generating strategies in America, most Black folx were withheld from generating wealth. The denial of wealth generation would cause the Black community to continue to be left behind in financial ruin as the nation continued to turn a blind eye. As a result of most Black families being denied wealth and homeownership while simultaneously being enrolled in schools funded by wealth and homeownership, Black students' futures were bleaker than their White counterparts. However, according to Dodge (2018), the *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* Supreme Court case of 1972 argued how school districts would respond to these inequities. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court ruled that supplementing state aid to schools with local property taxes did not violate the 14th amendment and reserved financial responsibility for public education to the state-therefore permitting inequitable funding practices to persist without federal accountability. Not only have funding practices been inequitable, but they have also been found unconstitutional in some states (*DeRolph v. State*, 1997). However, most states have not identified an alternative funding proposal. Therefore most state public schools are still funded by local taxes, and the economically disadvantaged in our society are still left divested and devalued.

Testing

Enter the National Commission on Excellence in Education report *A Nation at Risk* that kicked the Black community when it was down by forcing the educational reform to the top of the national and political agenda (Garner et al., 1983). *A Nation at Risk* used alarmist language to gain public attention to the quality of schools in the United States that were at risk of falling victim to global mediocrity (Ravitch, 2016). In response, the report offered solutions such as more robust graduation requirements, higher academic standards, high teaching standards, more instructional time, and higher teacher salaries (Garner et al., 1983). Most of the attention for these recommendations centered on increasing graduation requirements through high-stakes testing. However, as Ravitch (2016) suggests, solutions to addressing testing ignored the most important causes—poverty, inequality, racism, and segregation.

Less than 20 years later, in January 2002, the focus on high-stakes testing would culminate in No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). On the surface, No Child Left Behind was a direct attempt to ensure that all students mastered basic skills in reading and mathematics while providing the state's autonomy to decide what curriculum would be taught and what test students would take (Ravitch, 2016). No Child Left Behind sanctioned schools that did not make adequate progress in the form of closure and private or state takeover. No Child Left Behind attempted to do the impossible— reach 100 percent proficiency on standardized testing (No Child Left Behind, 2002). The federal government set out to monitor school progress with yearly progress scores to pace school districts in achieving the lofty goal. Schools that were not on track to reach the goal of 100 percent proficiency were faced with several options:

decrease proficiency standards, eliminate or excuse students who were predicted to fall short of proficiency, eliminate or reduce instructional time on non-tested content, seek a waiver from the federal government, or restructure (Ravitch, 2016). None of these options benefited underperforming public schools, especially schools with a majority of Black and low-income students, which have been historically under-invested and therefore performed lower on standardized tests (Koretz, 2017). Instead of creating pathways for improved performance, state and federal policies on testing continued to reinforce the notion that Black and minority students were intellectually inferior.

Discipline

Educators and policy-makers responded to inequitable educational experiences like the country was responding to inequitable societal incidents— hard-on-crime policies. Brandished as color-blind policies, hard-on-crime policies focused on low-income Black and Latinx youths and led to them being labeled by many public officials, including Hillary Clinton as "superpredators" (Nolan, 2011). Hard-on-crime policies suggested that more significant violations would be avoided by focusing on low-level offenses such as curfew, truancy, and loitering violations (Nolan, 2011).

Instead of addressing the inequitable educational experiences by addressing the root causes—poverty, inequality, racism, and segregation, public schools responded by addressing the symptoms— misbehavior, disengagement, and disrespect. The tough-on-crime practices and policies unfolding in the public sphere infiltrated public schools, as zero-tolerance policies and Drug-Free School legislation were adopted to address urban school violence (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Disciplinary actions include suspension, expulsion, and police intervention. According to Noguera (1996), these zero-tolerance

policies in schools are similar to those beyond schools that disproportionately target minorities, boys, and students with special needs. In Black and Latinx schools, increased order and maintenance measures were introduced, including armed and unarmed school resource officers, metal detectors, and stricter behavioral expectations. Just as the broken window policy in communities authorized police to be tough on minor crimes, the same policy authorized school leaders in Black schools to severely punish students whose violations were non-violent disorderly and insubordination infractions.

Often interacting with structural forces are cultural forces, which Wilson (2009) defines as:

> the sharing of outlooks and modes of behavior among individuals who face similar place-based circumstances or have the same social networks…Individuals act according to their culture, and they are following inclinations developed from their exposure to the particular traditions, practices, and beliefs among those who live and interact in the same physical and social environment" (p. 4).

Cultural forces involve the meaning-making and decision-making processes that determine how individuals within a group construct reality. Finally, cultural forces are:

> (1) national views and beliefs on race and (2) cultural traits- shared outlooks, modes of behavior, traditions, belief systems, worldviews, values, skills, preferences, styles of self-presentation, etiquette, and linguistic patterns- that emerge from patterns of intragroup interaction in settings created by discrimination and desegregation that reflect collective experiences in those settings. (Wilson, 2009, p. 15)

The cultural forces discussed are mattering, self-segregation, oppositional behaviors, and stereotype threat.

Mattering

In the face of these structural forces described above, Black students, especially those in urban schools, were sent message after message that they did not matter. Love (2019) describes students' mental and emotional baggage when they are told that their schools are failures only because they are filled with Black bodies. Black students are not pardoned from standardized tests or zero-tolerance policies because of the destabilization and terrorization of their communities. Instead, zero-tolerance policies and testing are part of the terrorization and destabilization. Black kids and their families were segregated in ghettos, which were intended to destroy them, if not physically, mentally, and emotionally. Black children were told with brutal clarity that they were worthless to the dominant culture and community. Black children were the victims of racism in schools and consequently robbed of their humanity and dignity while simultaneously being psychologically and spiritually murdered in the process. Bettina Love (2019) says, "Racism murders your spirit. Racism is traumatic because it is a loss of protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance—all things children need to be educated" (p. 38). Without conditions necessary to thrive, Black children focused on surviving.

Self-Segregation

Surviving for adolescents meant seeking to answer the question, "Who am I? Who can I be?" Furthermore, for Black students, it is also "What does it mean to be Black?" The answer to this question carries immense consequences for Black youth as though Blackness is polylithic and perceived by a White supremacist society as inferior

and monolithic. Too often, Black students form their self-perception in the context of how the rest of the world sees them and their experiences due to their Blackness (Tatum, 2017). Black students' experiences consist of being told they should attend community colleges instead of four-year universities with their White peers. Black students are also more likely to be disciplined, detained, suspended, and expelled (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000). Black students are less likely to be enrolled in honors and AP classes and more likely to be assigned to special education and vocational tracks (Hilliard, 1992). Black students are more likely to attend schools without AP and honors courses (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The experiences accompanying these statistics send unwanted, intrusive messages to Black students that they do not matter.

Moreover, in self-segregation, they not only begin to matter but also learn who they are, how they should act, what it means to be Black, and how to respond to racist experiences. Consequently, Black students begin to look for spaces where they do matter. This search for mattering causes students to self-segregate to limit the experiences of exclusion and apathy. However, more importantly, when Black students have these experiences, feel dehumanized and demoralized, they often look to debrief these encounters in safe spaces where they will be heard, validated, and understood (Tatum, 2017). Too often, when Black students confide in White students who do not have racialized experiences or do not understand them, in White students' attempts to make them feel better, White students dismiss and belittle Black students' experiences with remarks on the benevolence of the racial bias. The lack of support of their White peers causes Black students to turn to each other for the support they cannot find anywhere else, so they self-segregate (Tatum, 2017).

Oppositional Behavior

One response often associated with the educational experiences of Black students is that of oppositional behavior. The theory of oppositional behavior comes from a 1986 study by Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, where they found a pattern whereby many Black high school students responded with anger and resentment at their racialized experiences and understandably developed oppositional social identities. When minoritized groups that have been subordinated by anti-Black racism associate certain behaviors with Whiteness, they act in complete opposition and aberration to those behaviors in creating their own identity. One oppositional identity that developed due to the negative educational experiences of Black students was an anti-educational identity (Tatum, 2017). This anti-educational persona caused some Black students to reject academic success and oppose school personnel.

However, the issue of oppositional behavior predates Fordham and Ogbu's 1986 study. In 1958, Gordon Allport made the poignant point that "One's reputation, whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered, into one's head without doing something to one's character"(p. 139). Steele follows up the Allport quote with,

> The psyche of individual Blacks gets damaged, the idea goes, by bad images of the group projected in society—images of Blacks as aggressive, as less intelligent, and so on. Repeated exposure to these images cause these images to be 'internalized'" (p. 87).

Still, Nolan (2011) suggests that when students entered schools with negative reputations associated with racist prejudgments and negative stereotypes of violence and disorder and are presented with irrelevant educational curriculum due to boring classes by

teachers that do not understand them and decreased chances of graduation, higher education, and employment, oppositional identities are logical developments. Goffman's 1961 classic *Asylums* called oppositional identity the "under life" when institutions create strict behavioral norms and strip individuals of the ownership of their identity and autonomy of their individuality. Individuals respond by behaving in ways that go against institutional norms to construct their versions of themselves.

Stereotype Threat

Black students respond in various ways to the negative educational experiences of anti-Black racism. Some desire to overcome the racism and oppression they experienced. According to Tatum (2017), some Black students begin to reject all things Black to assimilate to the dominant culture. Tatum called this behavior "becoming raceless" because even though Black students could deny their Blackness, they are not permitted to be anything else.

Others became what Fordham (1988) called emissaries, who attempted to carry the entire Black race on their back through their successes. Instead of abandoning academic achievement because policies and practices make it nearly impossible or leaving their Blackness in the attempt to be accepted by the dominant culture, these Black students believe that by their success, they can change the attributes and characteristics associated with Blackness. Steele (2010) calls the constant attempt to slay a stereotype a Sisyphean task— one that must be done repeatedly in all space and at any time the stereotype arises. The task's magnitude and complications associated with its success often result in increased intellectual exhaustion. In the attempt to carry the entire race on one's shoulder, Black students divert their attention and decrease their mental capacity,

which often results in worse performance and lower general functioning, leading to many psychosocial stressors over time.

Statement of the Problem

The problem being addressed in this dissertation is the lack of Culturally Responsive School Leaders in schools geographically positioned within hyper-ghettoized urban communities where cultural mismatch leads to cultural deficit mentalities, beliefs, and ideologies within schools culminating in racist policies and practices that dominate the experiences of Black students.

In general, the educational experiences of Black students have been a concern in the United States for decades (Gardner, Rizzi, & Council, 2014; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009). Before desegregation, there was a concern that Black students were receiving inferior education to their White peers. So *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* ended state-sanctioned segregation. However, one of the consequences of *Brown* was the Black community's loss of over 38,000 Black teachers (Oakley et al., 2009). In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, Black students gained admission to schools with more resources. Still, they lost Black educators who looked like them, spoke like them, and possessed a natural appreciation for and connection to Black students. The loss of a shared culture is also known as cultural mismatch. Cultural mismatch often leads to cultural deficit mentalities, beliefs, and ideologies. Black children are considered inferior and lacking and therefore left vulnerable to emotional, physical, mental, and psychological violence in schools, where they are not and do not feel welcomed (Beals, 1994).

Deficit-based beliefs and ideologies occur when community values and practices are seen as inferior to the school's values (Fless, 2009; Ford, Farris, Tyson, and Trotman, 2001; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). As a result of cultural deficit-based beliefs and ideologies, many teachers, especially White teachers, evaluate Black students' behaviors and academic capacities more negatively than White students while having lower expectations for their Black students than for White students (Alexander, Enwisle, & Thomson, 1987; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Ehrenberg, Goldbaber, and Brew, 1995; Morris, 2005). Many White teachers have been found to expect more from students with White-sounding names regardless of their actual racial identity (Anderson-Clark, Green, & Henley, 2008; Foster, 1990). Rong (1996) found that Black students were rated lower on leadership metrics, social skills, and fundamental social desirability than White students by their White teachers. Many Black students receive lower ratings on classroom behavior metrics and academic assessments, leading to lower grade point averages and test scores (Roscigno & Ainsworrth-Darnell, 1999). Research has consistently asserted that as a result of cultural mismatch, many teachers equate Whiteness with more positive academic potential and the model "student," while Blackness is correlated with uninvolved, non-ideal troublemakers who are not serious about school and education (Morris, 2005; Staiger, 2004; Tyson, 2003).

Research has pointed to how Culturally Responsive School Leadership can address these experiences and realities for Black students. However, schools are still led by traditional leaders unable and uncommitted to improving the educational experiences of Black students.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of this research inquiry, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do Culturally Responsive School Leaders think about cultural capital in their often hyper-ghettoized urban communities?
2. How do Culturally Responsive School Leaders narrate their school leadership journey?
3. How do the school leaders' journey to CRSL and the way they think about cultural capital contribute to their roles and responsibilities as school leaders?

Limitations

There is no silver bullet to ending the dehumanization and disenfranchisement that generations of Black students and their communities have faced. With all significant concepts and theories have limitations. Alcoff (2015) warns of the limitations of all theories when she discusses how societies and individuals can be led astray when they take concepts, constructs, or theories as too literal, absolute, infallible, or unalterable. Structural and cultural forces, cultural and social capital, cultural mismatch, and Culturally Responsive School Leadership pose the danger of extremes. If individuals place too much emphasis on "doing it," they will not periodically pause to evaluate the impact they are having by doing it.

Likewise, despite the evidence of culturized and racialized school experiences, some researchers point to wealth and class as the primary contributor to educational disparities (Yeng & Conley, 2008). Some scholars are looking not at the presence of

money in a family's bank account or under their mattress but also at what resources the families can obtain as a result of this multiyear or permanent income tabulation and how different sources of income affect student experiences. The Yeng and Conley study confirmed that wealth is associated with higher quality learning resources and that wealth significantly impacted student performance, security, future orientation, and calculated risk-taking over time. Consequently, the conflation of wealth and class as contributors to the types of cultural capital rewarded by adults and employed by students is undeniable and limiting.

Definition of Terms

Cultural Capital: The most fundamental definition is a social asset used to promote social mobility in a stratified society. As used in critical theoretical frames, cultural capital refers to attitudes, preferences, pieces of knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials that are rewarded in school and society that can be exchanged for particular assets or the blockage and [if desired] the blockage of assets (Bourdieu as cited in Richardson, 1986; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Wildhagen, 2005; Willis, 1981). Cultural capital is also defined as dominant cultural attributes (i.e., White middle class), including informal knowledge about the school, traditional culture, linguistics, attitudes, and style (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Finally, cultural capital is defined as ideas and concepts held in common by an entire group that constitutes appropriateness, including speech codes, dress styles, musical preferences, artistic expressions, and spiritual solidarity (Carter, 2003; Collins, 1986; Franklin, 2002; Gouldner, 1979; Khalifa, 2010). Cultural capital would be understored by the concept of Community Cultural Wealth as the currency evident in resistant and resilient Communities of Color that refused to accept the

historically marginalized status oppressed upon them by White Communities. Community Cultural Wealth encompasses cultural capital in aspiration, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005).

Cultural Mismatch: According to Delpit (1995), the cultural mismatch in a school is the disparity between what is culturally valued by educators and their students due to the lack of alignment in racial and cultural demographics between students, families and communities and their teachers, administrators, and school staff.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership: Culturally Responsive School Leadership is understood as a leadership style codified by possessing an ethic of care for the wellbeing of students and their communities; possessing a critical consciousness about the educational system; establishing high expectations for students and their communities; and consequently, and leading change within the educational system through one's role and responsibility as a school leader (Davis, 2003; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Khalifa, 2014; Noddings, 1992)

Hyper-ghetto: According to Wacquant and Wilson, as cited in Cottingham & Ellwood (1989) and others, a hyper-ghetto is an economically disadvantaged ghetto or community that has virtually all of its social structure and organization, leading to social ills in health, education, housing, and social life (Taylor, 1990; Thomas, 1992).

Significance of the Study

In 2013, following the killing of Trayvon Martin, the Black community united behind the statement "Black Lives Matter" just as earlier generations had united behind "Black and Proud." The protests and demonstrations that followed the murder of Trayvon and many others have been cries of outrage from centuries of dehumanization,

oppression, and disenfranchisement. When the Black community proclaims “Black Lives Matter,” we demand justice. We are not saying “only” Black Lives Matter, but we are proclaiming to this nation that the assassination of unarmed Black folx by those called upon to protect and serve proclaims Black lives do not matter and are expendable.

My life is a demonstration and protest fueled by the same outrage. I am a Black male who attended and graduated from an urban, public, predominantly Black high school, a former teacher in one, and current principal in a predominantly Black urban high school. Too many Black children who look like me all across the country are subjected to unacceptable educational conditions resulting from structural exclusion and cultural mismatch- my children, my cousins, my nieces and nephews, and my students. Because of them, this work is also intimately personal. However, its necessity also reaches beyond my grasp.

This work is also about justice for an entire nation, not just Black children. Sandel (2009) describes justice as the right way of distribution and valuation; in this case, it is the distribution of access to high-quality education, the value Black children possess in the schoolhouse, and opportunities for upward mobility (Sandel, 2009). When the distribution and valuation are inequitable, the most vulnerable citizens suffer; when they suffer, all of society suffers. Society suffers because, without justice and democracy that values the most susceptible and dialogue where all voices are heard, society cannot thrive, much less survive for long. From a position of ignorance and denying the worst atrocities committed, the United States allows a deep sickness to go unaddressed. That which goes unaddressed goes untreated, and that which goes untreated becomes more devastating. The more devastating an illness becomes, the less likely the host will

survive. The United States is the host, and the survival and thriving of the nation are hanging in the balance.

In modern medicine, a diagnosis is often preceded by the identification of symptoms and followed by symptom treatment. In this case, the symptoms are the experiences of Black youths that are often filled with helplessness, hopelessness, and anger. The diagnosis reveals an educational institution built and maintained by institutional Anti-Black racism and White privilege. The cure for these symptoms is Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Culturally Responsive School Leadership ensures a process of accepting, validating, and valuing the home cultures, experiences, norms, and penchants of culturally diverse and minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Black children have suffered enough. The injustices must be named, and in their naming, the United States can be made aware of the domestic crimes committed, is committing, and hopefully can stop. Then, the potential for righting wrongs and curing ills becomes possible, and the next generations of Black students will live in a world where their cultural capital is valued and sustained. A systemic deconstruction of institutional Anti-Black racism is well underway.

Should schools in the United States begin to right the wrongs of centuries of educational injustice, America will survive and have a tremendous potential to thrive by uplifting and empowering a historically dehumanized and oppressed citizenry. Through Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Black children can be shown they matter, they will be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, they will be provided a culturally appropriate high-quality education, and their children and children's children

will experience the United States that healthy, whole, morally vindicated having resolved debts; a country deserving of being a country set upon a hill.

This study seeks to contribute to righting wrongs by illuminating the role that Culturally Responsive School Leaders play in improving educational experiences and, therefore, opportunities for Black students and other students of color. In Gloria Ladson-Billings' 2006 text, *From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. School*, the discussion of the problem within education moves from one of the achievement gap to one of educational debt. She concludes by asking, "Where could we go to begin from the ground up to build the kind of education system that would aggressively address the debt?", especially while facing poor housing, poor health, and poor governmental services (p. 10). This study continues the dialogue and proposes Culturally Responsive School Leaders as performing a significant role in addressing Black students' experiences in hyper-ghettoized urban communities where the most prominent educational debt can be found.

Summary

The United States has a race problem. Despite significant progress toward an anti-racist society, racism has evolved, making many consider it indomitable. Racism, as a function of race—a social construct without biological explanation— has often been perpetuated through the socialization of our nation's children through America's public school system. Avoiding placation, many communities and educational leaders are committed to ridding our public schools of racism and leading the next generation of African American youth into a period of Black Educational Thriving. While much attention has been paid to Culturally Relevant or Responsive Teachers, this study focuses

on school leaders who supervise, guide, and support teachers. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders and their understanding of and interaction with Cultural Capital as they perform their duties and responsibilities at the head of urban public schools situated within hyper-ghettoized urban communities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It has been over 60 years since the initial integration of Black children into traditionally only White schools in the name of educational equality, liberty, and justice. Nevertheless, for many Black students, equality is still elusive, liberty has been a mirage, and justice has felt esoteric. As Black students, their families, and the communities they are part of have fought to do more than just survive; they have done so without many educators who valued and championed Black culture. Without this sense of value, too many Black children still have unequal and unacceptable educational experiences, putting Black students at an academic disadvantage. The consequence of this disadvantage is an educational debt that the public education system manufactures, capitalizes upon, and maintains at the expense of Black minds, bodies, and souls. This current arrangement must be rectified, and the educators of Black students must be prepared to erase the educational debt, provide different experiences for Black students, and set them up for future success within and beyond the hyper-ghettoized urban communities, they are raised in. While must attention has historically been given to those directly in front of

students—teachers— this dissertation turns to school leaders as the facilitators of equality, liberty, and justice.

School Leadership focuses on how leaders interact with staff members, students, families, and other stakeholders to achieve an identified goal. Traditional school leadership seeks students' educational attainment, even when it costs Black students their culture. This pragmatism of traditional school leadership makes it woefully ill-quipped to promote Black Educational Striving in urban schools located within hyper-ghettoized urban communities. To encourage Black Educational Striving, urban schools must be led by Culturally Responsive School Leaders who genuinely care for Black students, families, and communities trapped in hyper-ghettoized urban communities, value Black culture, promote individual and collective critical consciousness in schools, maintain high expectations, and lead organizational change efforts.

This literature review will introduce the concept of cultural capital, then recall the history of Black culture and its exclusion from cultural capital as an explanation of educational inequities where cultural mismatch and the subsequent deficit mentalities that have plagued Black students, families, and communities. Then this literature review will highlight Culturally Responsive School Leadership as a potential remedy to the trauma of the Miseducation of Black Youth.

Cultural Capital

Unpacking Cultural Capital initially requires the explanation of culture and capital as the foundation from which the concept of *Cultural* Capital was founded. Yosso and Garcia (2007) defined culture as "behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people…evidenced in material and nonmaterial productions of a

people." The culture of a group then is often the result of a multitude of factors amalgamating to form conditions and structures from which the cultural behaviors and values are established. Yosso and Garcia also assert that in many ways, what has often been understood as culture has also been used synonymously with race and ethnicity. However, these three terms are unique and carry significantly different experiences and histories.

Capital, argues Bourdieu (1986), is property accumulated over time that carries the ability to re-produce itself in identical forms or produce various expanded forms of itself. Capital is also limited by the mortality of its bearer and therefore must be transmitted from one individual to another. This transmission typically follows biological procession by which the accumulated capital is passed from parent to offspring in perpetuity and often results in significant pools of capital passed down from generation after generation(Bourdieu, 1986).

These concepts of culture and capital combine to assert that cultural capital is a social asset used to promote social mobility in a stratified society(Bourdieu, 1986). As used in critical theoretical frames, cultural capital refers to attitudes, preferences, pieces of knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials that are held in common by an entire group and constitute appropriateness, are rewarded in school and society and can be exchanged for particular assets, and [if desired] used for the specific blockage of assets (Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Wildhagen, 2005; Willis, 1981). These attitudes, preferences, pieces of knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials are traditionally defined and codified by the dominant culture (i.e., White middle and upper-class men) and also include informal knowledge about school and society, cultural linguistics, attitudes, and

styles including speech codes, dress styles, musical preferences, artistic expressions, and spiritual experiences (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Carter, 2003; Collins, 1986; Franklin, 2002; Gouldner, 1979; Khalifa, 2010).

In this way, White, middle-upper-class men manufactured cultural capital in which their cultural norms became the standard by which all other cultures were measured (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In doing so, exclusive advantages were granted to White, middle and upper-class men and their children as they established criteria of evaluation that were most favorable to themselves and included in their definition of success the skill, talents, and abilities they were already successful at (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Cultural capital also assumed additional advantages based upon the amount of time spent accumulating it and the ability of its bearers to ensure its transmission, which came to be an intuitive and taken-for-granted way of life the longer it was maintained and accumulated. This massive and multi-generational accumulation of cultural capital rendered it invisible to its bearers, who operated the rungs of the American stratified society with an engrained ignorance of it.

Upon establishing the criteria by which all American society would be evaluated, White middle and upper-class men socialized their children and all around them to accept their evaluation. The following section will discuss the socialization process, which leveraged social capital as the mechanism through which cultural capital became a legitimate tool for extending and blocking access to resources, opportunities, and possibilities.

Social Capital

As Bourdieu cited in Karabel & Halsey (1977) explained, social capital is the sum of the actual or potential resources one has due to the networks and relationships one maintains. In this way, social capital provides each member the "backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit"(Bourdieu, 1986). Lin (2001) suggests that social capital is a resource embedded in a social structure that can be utilized or mobilized to achieve determined ends. The social structure, relationships, and networks in which social capital is embedded in hierarchical, integrated, and self-reproductive institutions with the ability to counter the established order for those who possess or transfer it in manners that would not be possible in its absence (Bourdieu as cited in Karabel & Halsey, 1977); Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Contrary to cultural capital, social capital is found neither in the actors themselves nor in the physical elements produced (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Instead, social capital is located between different actors and positioned as they settle into hierarchical tiers (Coleman, 1988). This hierarchical social structure of relationships establishes the enduring quality of the social structure and defines how resources are shared through social inclusion and exclusion within a group.

Inclusionary and exclusionary practices include acts of direct selection, over-selection, relegation, and self-selection, which combine to dehumanize, disrupt, humiliate, and alienate out-group members while promoting privilege, apathy, and aggression from in-group members (Bourdieu, 1986). Direct selection occurs when the in-group selects those with the same culture to share resources. Through direct selection,

the group is re-produced and expanded through practical and symbolic occasions such as rallies, parties, and hunts, socially instituted names or organizations such as clubs, families, or schools, or cultural ceremonies that serve as membership signals to the group.

Over-selection occurs when those without particular types of cultural capital are expected to perform as well as those with cultural capital despite their cultural difference. This reality leads to the expectation that culturally disadvantaged individuals perform better than their culturally advantaged counterparts. Relegation is when those without cultural capital find themselves in less desirable positions with less access to opportunities for advancement. Self-selection is when individuals exclude themselves from spaces when they perceive that they are unfamiliar with the specific cultural capital and norms required to succeed in an environment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The inclusionary and exclusionary practices cooperate to establish closure. Closure as an apparatus of social capital is the foundational mechanism that facilitates cultural capital and occurs when a social group and its resources are inaccessible to outsiders (Coleman, 1988). In this closed social group, individuals pool their resources together and then determine who can and cannot gain access to the group's resources. The pooling of resources is built upon effective norm-setting and trustworthiness, so group members are obligated to pay and repay each other. In effectively closed groups, the expectation of payment or repayment creates a credit slip, which becomes the basis for social capital. Individuals possessing multiple credit slips have high social capital, further enabling cultural capital development.

When individuals equipped with the social capital acquire certain attitudes, preferences, pieces of knowledge, behaviors, goods, credentials, skills, speech codes,

dress styles, musical preferences, artistic expressions, spiritual solidarity, and abilities to obtain access to the pooled resources, they have developed cultural capital. Cultural capital, within closed systems, operates to not only esteem specific actions but also to condemn other actions that are less desirable, establishing the boundaries by which cultural identities are distinguished and cultural capital established. In effect, cultural capital is only possible through the closure of a social group. Without closure, individuals cannot amass the necessary social capital to assume the role of cultural capital brokers who maintain monopolies on scarce resources, exclude others from opportunities, resources, and access to high-status groups, signal what is to be valued within groups, or mark the cultural distance, proximity, and ranking (Bourdieu as cited in Richardson, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lamont & Lareau, 1988;).

Socialization teaches individuals about their culture —the way to navigate their world— and, most importantly, which spaces, opportunities, resources, and assets are available or close to them. This education on navigating the world harnesses each individual's specific cultural identities, knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, aspirations, languages, abilities, and emotional responses to promote or deny survival and success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Gee, 1989). Primarily, socialization occurs during adolescence when there are widespread changes in children's bodies and worlds- biologically, socially, and psychologically as they prepare for adulthood (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). At this time, adolescents are naturally embedded into networks where they learn how society works through direct interactions with parents, peers, and non-familial adults who operate as institutional agents.

Institutional Agents

Institutional agents are individuals within public and private institutions that significantly impact the socialization of adolescents by operating the proverbial gears of social stratification and social inequality (Ianni, 1989; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Through direct engagement, media, or policy development, institutional agents provide resources and support to adolescents to help them navigate situations in their neighborhoods, communities, schools, and society (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Institutional agents also occupy relatively high-status positions, which they mobilize in such a way to act on behalf of others who do not possess access to the resources, opportunities, privileges, and services they have (Lin, 2001).

For this study, the primary site of socialization for Black youth in hyper-ghettoized urban communities will be the public school where they engage with institutional agents known as educators. As institutional agents, educators can operate in one of two ways: gatekeeping or empowering. The following section will compare the gatekeeping agent to the empowerment agent.

Gatekeeping Agents. Gatekeeping agents are those individuals who work within institutions that serve a mixture of people from different communities, races, classes, and genders and consciously and unconsciously render service in ways that maintain the cultural status quo and support the dominant culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Conchas, 2006; Lucas, 1999; Stanton- Salazar, 1997). As gatekeepers who allow the dominant culture to determine how resources are allocated and rules are established for students, teachers and leaders unconsciously and uncritically gravitate to and reward students who exhibit dominant cultural characteristics, leaving all other students behind

(Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Porter, 1976). Teachers act as gatekeepers when using dominant linguistic patterns and dress styles as indicators of intelligence and respectability. Fine (1991) and Fordham (1988) noticed that some schools and teachers ignored students' intelligence that demonstrated interaction styles that were not valued by the dominant culture. Consequently, students who did not possess dominant cultural capital found themselves, victims of unacceptable exclusionary practices, regardless of their intellect or academic capabilities (Porter, 1976; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Too often, the same connections that youths in hyper-ghettoized urban communities are expected to develop to achieve social mobility and success are the same connections intentionally withheld from them even within their public schools (Conchas, 2006; Ianni, 1989; Lareau, 2003; Prado, 2006). Often, youth aware of the socialization agendas and pressures to culturally assimilate struggle to connect with the adults tasked with helping them. Wynn et al. (1987) suggest that all healthy developed youth require regular and unobstructed opportunities for constructing relationships with instrumental individuals who can assist them in pursuing their dreams. This is where empowerment agents matter.

Empowerment Agents. Empowerment agents utilize their position and power within institutions and organizations to empower students in hyper-ghettoized urban communities and dismantle the mechanisms of oppression, dehumanization, and disenfranchisement (Wehlage et al., 1989). Empowerment agents understand that Black families restricted to hyper-ghettoized urban communities are typically unable to move to different communities, attend other schools, or change their culture. Therefore,

empowerment agents assume the burden of justice by facilitating access to necessary resources, opportunities, privileges, services, videlicet power, and capital for Black students and their families to control their own life, accomplish important life goals in the face of opposition, and create the worlds they desire (Alschuler, 1980; Flynn, 1994, Malon & Salem, 1995, Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Individuals who can effectively position their cultural capital are positioned to be empowerment agents in the most oppressive environments and institutions and are given access to wield previously inaccessible social capital.

Freire (1970), the architect of educational empowerment, suggests that for educational empowerment to be effective, students must be active influencers in the institutions that impact their own lives and given opportunities to uncover the root causes of their collective and individual positions within society. This process occurs in three phases: listening, dialoguing, and acting. In the first phase, the community identifies primary problems and priorities, while institutions and agencies that are within yet not wholly part of the community listen. The second phase includes the participatory dialogue, whereby the community, institutions, and agencies investigate issues through code-based inquiry processes to generate potential solutions. The final third phase describes the action phase, where the long and arduous journey to action on prioritized problems and desired actions commences.

In connecting the Miseducation of Black Youth to the concepts of cultural and social capital as disseminated by institutional agents, the malevolence of dominant cultural capital as *ways of being* and *methods of knowing* that were institutionalized and normalized became apparent (Carter, 2003). Subsequently, to the non-White, the non-

middle-class, and the non-male, school success in the form of high academic marks, educational credentials, diplomas, and degrees became inaccessible. On the other hand, Black students, families, and communities without cultural capital and school success are successfully prevented from accessing societal opportunities, assets, and resources. However, before the arrival of Empowerment agents, Black folx turned inward for a sense of community, value, respect, and agency.

The following section will chronicle the history of Black folx in America and then transition to how public schools cooperated with the hegemonic socially stratified society to devalue and disenfranchise Black communities and the Black children being educated within their walls.

Black History

The history of Black folx in America is long and tumultuous but essential to understanding the current experiences of Black children educated in urban schools situated within hyper-ghettoized communities. This section briefly describes the Black American experience from slavery to Jim Crow, then from Jim Crow to the "New Jim Crow."

Slavery

For the sake of this dissertation, the history of Black America will begin in the 14th century in Africa. Despite popular racist conjecture that Africans were barbaric, Davidson (1966) suggests that ancient African civilizations were civilized and primarily safe except for occasional war. Patterson (1982) portrays the case that Western African civilization depended on it. An implication of war during the 14th century, also extending into the 21st century, was the existence of slavery. In African culture, plantation-like

economics was based on the use of Moorish, Greek, and Caucasian enslaved people; however, once the cost for these enslaved people became less profitable, slaveholders and sellers turned to Sub-Saharan Africans to fill the labor force void (Davis, 1984).

Although initially the result of war, slavery continued due to the need for free labor to support the African economy. Africa's ruling elites turned to professional man-hunters and slave raids to procure Africans to maintain their social positioning (Oliver, 1967). These practices instilled fear and insecurity into the hearts and minds of those Africans who did not have the social class and capital to avoid the hands of manhunters and those who hired them. To avoid capture, many Africans, capable of leaving their homes, left their homes to settle in locations where manhunters could not or would not go (Oliver, 1967). Fear and insecurity then led to a fragmentation of the African community.

The enslaved that were either captured by man-hunters or sold through war crimes were then shipped to various slave-trading posts including Brazil, British and French Caribbean, Spanish, Dutch, and British North America, Europe, and the Danish West Indies between the years 1526 and 1810 (Fogel & Engerman as cited in Thernstrom, 1989). Bailey & Kennedy (1984) suggested that most enslaved Africans loathed leaving Africa so much that in transit across the Atlantic ocean, many leaped out of the boats to drown or be eaten by sharks. Those who either chose not to or could not choose death over the unknown horrors that awaited them arrived in the New World were auctioned off with barely any clothing to display their physical assets. For the enslaver, inspecting physical attributes for the purchase and enslavement of the African male body was to own his labor, but to own the African female body was to own the race (White, 1979).

Once Africans were sold into slavery, typically stripped from their family and friends, they were immediately put to work on cotton, rice, and tobacco plantations. They were given a European name, a place to rest their heads, and a new status in a new land - subhuman. This new status—subhuman— was created to justify the enslavement of Africans for the benefit of the enslaving White economy. The enslaved soon became called Black while their enslavers called themselves White. While being White was based upon having un-melanated skin, Whiteness was created to explain and justify the systematic oppression, seizure, and appropriation of Black labor through a social construct of race as property. Whiteness became the conceptual basis for power relationships in which the dominance of White people was accompanied by the subordination of People of color (Harris, 1993). Whiteness as property legitimized expectations of power and control that maintained White privilege and domination by providing Whites with exclusive rights to freedom, the enjoyment of certain privileges, and special abilities to draw advantages from Whiteness (Harris, 1993). Historically, some of these freedoms, privileges, and advantages included fundamental liberty and freedom from enslavement, whether one could vote, travel freely, attend schools of one's choice, work in an industry of one's choosing, pursue a quality education, and obtain fair and equitable treatment by the legal, judicial, and law enforcement community. The Missouri Compromise of 1787 cemented this social construct of Black and White when the states engaged in political debate on how to count their population, which dictated the legislative power each state possessed. While the Northern states refused to count the enslaved Africans, the South demanded the enslaved be considered. The courts would eventually decide the matter through a legal compromise; enslaved Africans would be

regarded as three-fifths a person while Whites were counted as a whole person (Forbes, 2007).

Enslaved Africans were also subjected to colonial statutes such as the *Black Codes* of 1712 in South Carolina. The Black Codes crystallized the Black-White dichotomy and racial stratification. The Black Codes legalized the slave classification to any African adult and their children, the prohibition of slave travel without express written permission from their enslaver or being accompanied by a White person, and regulated differentials of weapons for enslavers of Africans and the Africans that were enslaved (Kutler, 1979). These colonial statutes prohibited enslaved Africans from becoming literate and punished those who tried and assisted them with dismemberment or death (Lincoln, 1967). Henry Berry, a Colonial Virginia congressman, said, "We have closed every avenue through which light may enter their minds if we could only extinguish the capacity to see the light our work would be complete" (Horsman, 1981, p. 101). This positioning of Black persons as subhuman through social and legal means underscores the depth and history of anti-Black racism in the United States.

The continued oppression and disenfranchisement of enslaved Africans would eventually foster a form of solidarity by subjecting enslaved Africans from different countries, tongues, and cultures into a single racial group. This Black race would develop their own culture, institutions, religions, and norms that would foreshadow their future liberation (Allen, 1994; Rawick, 1972). As the Black identity began to solidify and the enslaved unified as a race, they began to mount a resistance to slavery, including increasingly attempting to run away, becoming less efficient, sabotaging their work, dividing the plantation organizational structure, deceiving their enslaver, occasionally

killing themselves, and organizing strategic rebellions (Aptheker, 1943; Rawick, 1972; Stampp, 1956).

As enslaved Blacks increased their solidarity and agency, the American states attempted to find their solidarity amidst a budding civil war. Abraham Lincoln, president of the American Union in 1862, signed an executive order known as the Emancipation Proclamation (Welling, 1880). This executive order liberated all enslaved Blacks in the southern states that rebelled against the Union. The Emancipation Proclamation was followed by three poignant amendments that would forever change the trajectory of the Black community- the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865; the 14th Amendment, which granted citizenship to previously enslaved males in 1868; and the legal right to vote in the 15th Amendment of 1870.

Jim Crow

As slavery slowly began to fade into the recent history of the Black journey, Black folx saw an opportunity for advancement that would substantially lift the quality of life for the newly freed Black folx. For the first time in the New World, Blacks gained legislative power through voting, intellectual elevation through public education, and necessities such as food, clothing, fuel, and others. These advancements also allowed Black folx to become successful business people and crystallize their social upgrades (Alexander, 2012). Unfortunately, this advancement would not be without consequences. As the lines distinguishing Blacks from Whites began to blur, White supremacy and White rage sought a method to secure Whiteness and White privilege and found it in Jim Crow laws and etiquettes. Jim Crow sought to take back all that had been given through the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments.

Jim Crow was "a complex system of racial laws and customs in the South that ensured White social, legal, and political domination of Blacks" (Wormser, 2003). While the 13th Amendment liberated the Black folx, Jim Crow developed vagrancy laws. The subsequent convict leasing re-enslaved them by sending Black folx from jail back to plantations by declaring unemployment a crime and applying this crime only to Black folx to re-establish forced labor (Alexander, 2012). Where the 14th Amendment granted Black men and women citizenship and equal protection under the law, Jim Crow and the White supremacist Ku Klux Klan terrorized and lynched Black men and women—including my great-grandfather Sidney Towns— without any interference or opposition from police or the courts (Degruy, 2017). Finally, as the 15th Amendment guaranteed Black citizens the right to vote, Jim Crow blocked Black suffrage at the ballot box and registration. At the ballot box, Black votes were often stolen, tallied incorrectly, or not counted at all. At registration, Black citizens faced poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests to prevent them from arriving at the ballot (Alexander, 2012).

Jim Crow then legalized racial segregation through the 1896 Supreme Court Case, Case of *Plessy v. Ferguson,* which permitted separate spaces as long as they were equal (Alexander, 2012). Despite the prerequisite of equality, the American court system would uphold segregation for almost a century, establishing two Americas—one filled with disenfranchisement and subjugation and the other complete with supremacy and opportunity. Alexander (2012) describes the expansiveness of Jim Crow when she says:

> Every state in the South had laws on the books that disenfranchised Blacks. It discriminated against them in virtually every sphere of life, lending sanction to racial ostracism that extended to schools, churches, housing, jobs, restrooms,

> hotels, restaurants, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries. Politicians competed with each other by proposing and passing ever more stringent, oppressive, and downright ridiculous legislation (p. 35).

Jim Crow ruled the laws and societal structures from the 1870s to the 1960s when Black Activists mobilized to overthrow Jim Crow and usher in a new era of America's Racial history known as The Civil Rights Movement. During this time, Blacks and Whites, Southerners and Northerners, Protestants, Catholics, and non-religious descended into the Southern States to engage in direct action against Jim Crow. They were led by organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People(NAACP) and Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and leaders such as Martin L. King Jr., Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin, Anne Braden, Whitney Young Jr., John Lewis, Roy Wilkins, and Frances Pauley. They boycotted, marched, and they organized demonstrations; they traveled, they migrated, and they created separate institutions. They committed to dismantling Jim Crow regardless of the risks, and by 1965, they had successfully reduced Jim Crow to a national relic by ushering in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Hall, 2004).

The "New Jim Crow"

Though Jim Crow ended with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, a more insidious institution took its place. Michelle Alexander called this institution the New Jim Crow, the most significant contributor to modern Black culture (Alexander, 2012). The New Jim Crow conceptualized by mass incarceration was a "tightly networked systems of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race" (Alexander, 2012, p.

13). Slavery and Jim Crow laid the foundation for racial stratification in the United States, and the New Jim Crow invisibly carried it into the 21st century.

The primary vehicle of The New Jim Crow was the War on Drugs, which President Ronald Reagan announced in 1980. After the declaration of war, crack cocaine was introduced into poor Black communities already crumbling under the weight of deindustrialization and suburbanization. These three factors - deindustrialization, suburbanization, and the War on drugs gave rise to the hyper-ghetto. According to Wacquant & Wilson, as cited in Cottingham & Ellwood (1989), a hyper-ghetto is a poor ghetto or impoverished community that has lost all its social structure and organization, leading to social ills in health, education, housing, and social life (Taylor, 1990; Thomas, 1992). These legal practices and structural forces naturally led to grave changes in hyper-ghettoized urban communities through cultural changes.

In hyper-ghettoized urban communities, after deindustrialization, suburbanization, and the War on Drugs, Black culture experienced further disenfranchisement and degradation but found a voice and image in the form of young Black men. While the 1940s through the 1960s centered Black men and women in their "Sunday best" marching for equal rights, the 1970s through the 1990s highlighted pants sagging scanty clade image of Black men and women dancing to gangsta rap. This shift and ultimate rebranding of the Black community developed in the enmeshed space between the "code of the street" and the "convict's code" (Wacquant, 2001) popularized by gangsta rap in the late 1980s and 1990s. While scores of Black men and women were being incarcerated, they learned to maintain obedience to prison rules even when they were no longer behind bars. This was the "convict's code." And it became the code to live by for

many Black folx who were getting restless with the institutional and generational trauma of anti-Black racism.

According to Kelly (as cited in Katz, 1993), modern Black culture, as depicted in hip hop and rap music, elevated the creativity of Black art as a reflection of life in neighborhoods rife with systematically concentrated poverty, police brutality, and mass incarcerations. Arguably, the first gangsta rappers originated in California with the group N.W.A. - Niggas with Attitude. Some of NWA's most popular songs include *Fuck da Police* and *Gangsta Gangsta*, whereby the lyrical masterminds behind the group's message decided to depart from the traditional benevolent Black advocated by the Civil Rights leaders publicized the underlife in the hyper-ghetto (Canton, 2006). For N.W.A, years of fighting for civil rights provided no better life prospects than assuming the identity the dominant culture believed they were gangsters, villains, and criminals. Therefore N.W.A. donned the gangster persona like a badge of honor, capturing their daily life struggles in the most vivid imagery of the time. Gangster rap would become extremely marketable to suburban White males. N.W.A. could use their record sales to obtain a life they only dreamed of- one of the massive amounts of money and women—something neither the civil rights activists nor the people they fought for experienced.

Gangsta rap told the stories that so many hopeless adolescents in the hyper-ghetto knew all too well. In such environments, gangsta rap highlighted and popularized the underlife of the hyper-ghetto with its rampant police brutality, poverty, and mass incarceration. It was in this environment that modern Black hip-hop culture emerged. In other words, the norms, behaviors, and codes of 21st-century Black hip-hop culture developed in the enmeshed space between the "code of the street" communicated through

gangs, drugs, and crime and the "convict code" through police brutality and mass incarcerations (Wacquant, 2001).

Black Schools in Hyper-Ghettoized Urban Communities

The historical account of the group of people contemporarily called Black is long and arduous, but education had often been considered a mechanism for social advancement. Unfortunately, after *Brown v. Board of Education*, public schools in hyper-ghettoized urban communities reproduced the socially stratified society. Before *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black students were educated by Black educators in Black schools. These schools were part of the community, held community values, and were both contributors to and influenced by Black culture. These schools were accustomed to Black culture, Black communities, and the best methods for accomplishing Black success; however, these schools were severely under-resourced and underfunded. In the years following *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black students lost many of these schools and educators. They found themselves in schools that rejected their Black culture, especially that which was born from their experiences in hyper-ghettoized urban communities. Instead, these schools only valued the cultures of the White, middle upper-class males.

Black children were forced to attend schools where educational policies, learning theories, and behavioral expectations rarely included them or their cultures. In these schools, upgraded resources were exchanged for cultural insensitivity and unresponsiveness, and White supremacist educators acted as cultural capital brokers (Irvine, 1990; Khalifa, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In explicit and implicit ways, public school educators subjected Black students to subservience by instituting color-blind curricular, instructional, and managerial practices, with holistically less emphasis, care,

concern, and acknowledgment of the impacts of race culture, and community. Educators rejected Black culture and the Hip Hop culture that many students adopted and emulated. They left Black students by giving less attention and special assistance and considering them less intelligent. They rejected Black students by evaluating them based on expectations that Black students and families were unaware of and, more vehemently, were unable to meet (Laureau & Weininger, 2003). These systemic rejections plagued Black students with more toxic and strained teacher-student relationships that would devastate their academic pursuits (Lareau, 2000; Wildhagen, 2009).

The neglect of Black children and Black culture would crystallize the Miseducation of Black Youth as Black academic performance, and educational experiences plummeted. Black students were likelier to achieve lower scores on specific standardized tests, graduation rates, and college matriculation and completion rates than White students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). They were more likely to be disciplined, detained, suspended, and expelled (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000). Black students were less likely to be enrolled in honors and AP classes and more likely to be assigned to special education and vocational tracks (Darling-Hammond,1997; Hilliard, 1992). Black students were also more likely to live in communities with lower tax bases to fund schools (Taylor & Piche, 1991). All these factors coalesced to exclude Black students from schools and the educational curriculum altogether, marginalize their cultural identity, and use them as scapegoats for the academic problems that existed in their respective institutions (Ferguson, 2000; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ginwright, 2004; Lipman, 2003; Love, 2004; Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene, 2005; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1988; Yosso, 2005). In fact, for these

students, their families, and communities, the only time they were involved in the school were for instructional formalities, sporting events, fundraisers, and disciplinary conferences (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2004). With no consistent and valiant effort to engage communities in their schools, Black students found the doors to a quality education closed and their spirits murdered (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Khalifa, 2010; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Okey & Cusick, 1995).

This closure led many Black students, their families, and communities to abandon the schools they attended. They often seem to have rejected the academic success they once believed would carry them up the ladder of America's stratified society (Fordham & Ogbu, 1968). For many parents, abandoning the schools was dutiful when they were expected to comply with school-established levels of appropriateness, schools that had historically oppressed and discriminated against them, their families, and communities (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). However, due to compulsory school attendance laws, there was no escape for them, so many students, families, and communities refused to invest in education (Roscigno, Tomaskovic- Devey, & Crowley, 2006). For those students and families that managed to maintain a slither of hope after the oppression from public schools in hyper-ghettoized urban communities, they were left with two options: reject their own culture while working twice as hard to potentially achieve a fraction of the success guaranteed to their White peers *or* embrace their Blackness, using it as motivation to overcome their downtrodden predicament, while accepting whatever consequences accompanied the judgments of schools officials even if those consequences included their criminalization (Ferguson, 2000; LaMont & Lareau, 1988).

The Black students, families, and communities who embraced their culture and their Blackness refused to perceive their worth from the perspective of cultural deficit held by dominant cultural capital. Yosso (2005) argued that culture and knowledge had been used to "silence, marginalize, and render People of Color invisible…[then People of Color could use their culture and knowledge] to re-envision the margins as places empowered by transformative resistance" (p. 70). This way, Black students, families, and communities developed semi-autonomous cultural capital to evaluate themselves. Yosso (2005) considered this cultural capital to be Community Cultural Wealth. Community Cultural Wealth is "an array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso & Garcia, 2007). Community Cultural Wealth has six dimensions of capital evident within Communities of Color: aspiration, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant. Aspirational capital meant that in the presence of real and perceived barriers and dangers, students and their families dared to maintain hopes and dreams for their future. Linguistic capital refers to students' abilities to communicate in multiple languages and styles, such as Black students' abilities to speak in African American English Vernacular (AAEV) and Standard English (SE). Familiar capital referenced cultural knowledge passed down from matriarchs, patriarchs, and extended family members full of communal history and connections. Social capital was understood as the dissemination of institutional knowledge within community spaces for collective benefit. Navigational capital described the ability of People of Color to maneuver spaces that were not created for them. For many Black students, their ability to maneuver within White spaces allowed them to achieve unprecedented success and achievement. Finally,

resistance capital encompassed the transformative power of resistance and opposition to challenge inequality. In many Black spaces, this form of capital integrated the spirit of collective resilience and the perseverance of Black ancestors (Carter, 2003; Swidler, 1986; Yosso, 2005).

In developing their own social and cultural capital, many Black folx in hyper-ghettoized urban communities placed value on navigational capital by behaving instrumentally to gain access to dominant cultural resources. They consistently shifted between the dominant cultural capital valued in schools and non-dominant cultural capital valued in their communities (Goodwin, 1991; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) called this consistent cultural capital shifting cultural status positioning. It allowed individuals to move in and out of their cultural groups as empowered individuals in control of their destinies. Black students employed their Black cultural capital when appropriate, authenticating their Black identity where it was required for communal benefits and survival. Likewise, these same individuals expressed the dominant culture and exchanged it for academic success (Carter, 2003).

The ability of Black students to leverage the cultural capital of the dominant culture affirmed the traditional view of cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu as the dominant culture's way of knowing and method of knowing. However, the ability of Black students, families, and communities to develop their currency and Community Cultural Wealth elevated the non-dominant view of cultural capital that contradicted the very legitimacy of dominant theories of cultural capital. In 1986, Patricia Collins defined cultural capital as the composite of ideas and concepts acquired from previous experiences, without any reference to dominant or non-dominant cultures. Franklin

(2002) described cultural capital as a sense of group consciousness and collective identity that becomes a resource capable of advancing the entire group. Carter (2003) suggested that cultural tasks are context-specific and multi-dimensions. This categorization of cultural capital is both institutionalized and transferable - carrying across different spaces, situations, and reference groups as signals of cultural status (Carter, 2003; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Additionally, for Yosso, this capital was acquired primarily through one's family and then through one's schooling, where schools and families equipped adolescents with the proper cultural ways of being, doing, and knowing. Therefore, whether cultural capital was confined to the dominant or non-dominant culture, schools and educators maintain significant roles in its development, maintenance, and dissemination.

Acknowledging that much research has centered classroom teachers in the discussion of cultural capital and responsiveness, this dissertation centered on school leaders because they influenced school climates, cultures, relationships, and practices (Daniels, 2012; Harris, 1999; Rael, 2002). When school leaders are culturally responsive, they lead with a steady dose of the protestation of and liberation from oppressive educational practices and experiences while acknowledging and employing their right to (1) prioritize teaching and curriculum that focuses on the students in the school, their culture, values, and social capital, (2) build relationships, and (3) engage the holistic identity of students through Culturally Responsive School Leadership and teaching practices and (4) boldly proclaim cultural visibility, invitation, acceptance, appreciation, value, validation, and usefulness (Evans, 2008; Gay, 2010; Ghong, Saah, Larke, &

Webb-Johnson, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Weaver, 2009). The following section will examine school leadership before analyzing the Culturally Responsive School Leader.

School Leadership

Leadership is a process of influence to achieve a goal (Northouse, 2007). School leadership is the process by which individuals spark the commitment of students, staff, and stakeholders to initiate and maintain programs, practices, and processes within schools that academically, physically, and emotionally support and serve students and their communities (Bush & Glover, 2003; Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). Therefore, school leadership is how an individual influences others to pursue particular school-based values, beliefs, or visions (Bush & Glover, 2003).

School leaders maintain high yet reasonable expectations for individuals and collectives in the institution; pursue pragmatic approaches, distribute leadership in a collective, layered, multidimensional way; effectively set direction, develop people, lead change, and improve teaching and learning; challenge status quos, while fighting for the best opportunities for students through a positive and empowering school climate; build capacity amongst students and adults; garner trust and respect from the school community by being transparent, fair, integrity acting, and inclusive; are lifelong learners who were recklessly pursue knowledge, ideas, growth and opportunities for themselves and their schools, possess personal qualities, beliefs, and values such as optimism, persistence, trustworthiness, tolerance, empathy, resilience, benevolence, honesty, respect, and humility; are driven by a desire to provide the best educational environment for all students, find practices specific to the context and culture of their schools, and sustain success (Leithwood et al., 2017).

School leaders establish the teacher development and improvement process, plan, coordinate, evaluate the instructional and managerial processes, and create and maintain safe and structured learning environments (Robinson et al., 2008). They hire staff, allocate resources, and communicate the vision and mission to the staff and community (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Hallinger & Heck, 2001). School leaders influence curriculum and instruction and provide feedback and recognition to all stakeholders (Dos & Savas, 2015; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Kruger, 2009; May et al., 2012; Ross & Gray, 2006;).

Effective school leadership has been known to impact student learning by attracting and retaining educators (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002); enhancing student experiences through a positive school climate (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Sweetland & Smith, 2002; Hoy Tarter, & Bliss, 1990); sustaining school and community relations by building trust and rapport with community members(Anderson, 2009; Cooper, 2009; Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Shirley, 1997) and producing educational policy through advocating for what students, their families, and communities need (Hallenger and Heck, 1998).

School Leadership in the Age of Accountability

Modern school leadership is shaped and influenced by broad cultural shifts, policy changes, educational trends, and even demographic variations that occur over time (Leithwood et al., 2004). The educational trend toward data-based decision-making has been the most influential contributor to modern school leadership. The tool used to supply data in the current educational regime has been the high-stakes standardized test

which had predominated education in the United States since 2002, when George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. No Child Left Behind focused substantial resources on testing students to make informed decisions on the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and districts. The informed decisions included how underperforming schools would be punished and over-performing schools would be rewarded, from threats of employment loss to financial incentives for high performance. As a result of punishing schools, districts, and teachers for student test performance, the educational system in the United States shifted the burden of responsibility in education from the collaborative effort of schools and communities to a single fault scenario where schools were to blame.

The responsibility shift was not wholly unfounded. Hallinger et al. (1996) had shown that school leaders and teachers significantly impacted student learning and test performance. Leithwood & Riehl (as cited in Firestone & Riehl) echoed Hallinger by proposing that principals alone have significant effects on student learning and are less influential than the quality of curriculum and instruction in the classroom. Branch et al. (2013) proclaimed that principalship is the position most empowered by district and state policy to create and or sustain effective schools. Leithwood et al. (2004) suggested that educational reformers had always known that effective educational reform required school leadership changes, thus surmising that the shift of responsibility was no accident. In the early years of the new millennium, school leadership was thrust into the limelight of educational accountability and has remained there since (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Muijs, 2010).

As a result of the grave consequences that accompanied the poor academic performance, including school re-constitutions and massive employment terminations,

school leadership began to evolve from traditional top-down bureaucratic leadership approaches to more distributed leadership approaches. In the distributed leadership approach, role expansion would lead to a distribution of voice and power to those most impacted by the outcomes of school success. In this new leadership approach, the individuals leading the theoretical work of organizational structure, culture, development, collaboration and instruction, organizational change, and vision building were the ones executing the work in practical and meaningful ways (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hallinger, 2003; Rowan, 1990; Senge, 1990; Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003).

Specifically, where traditional school leadership considered the principal the sole source of expertise, vision, and decision-making power, modern school leadership philosophies focus on looking beyond the principal and into the classrooms and community for expertise, vision, and decision-making. School leadership became a joint endeavor, including principals, teachers, students, parents, community members, community organizations, businesses, and institutions (Leech & Fulton, 2008; Pounder, 1998).

School Leadership in Hyper-ghettoized Urban Communities

Schools in hyper-ghettoized urban communities were and are still situated within a long history of oppression from cultural and structural forces where school leadership changes occur differently. The transition from top-down bureaucratic leadership practices to more shared leadership philosophies is significant for all schools but more urgent and critical to school success for schools serving hyper-ghettoized communities. While educational institutions that were not victims of hyper-ghettoization faced the evolutionary transition of school leadership head-on, educational institutions in hyper-

ghettoized urban communities faced a different dilemma: (explicitly or implicitly) to control or empower students and communities that did not have the cultural capital to succeed in society.

Regardless of their racial and cultural identity, school leaders were and are positioned within the educational institution to either reproduce or eliminate oppressive and exclusionary practices; to uplift or condemn the very students they were charged with educating; to create inclusive spaces that are responsive to the cultural and racial divides prevalent in hyper-ghettoized schools and communities or consign themselves to consciously or unconsciously contribute to the system of racial oppression and dehumanization. Principals are presented with two options: (1) they can continue racist practices of oppression and exclusion by endorsing policies that are flagrantly racism or perhaps colorblind at best, or (2) they can lead schools where Black children, families, and communities know they matter and experience the normalization of high-quality teaching and learning for explicitly tailored for them (Cooper, 2009; Gooden & Dantley, 2012).

Next, we will look at the four different School Leadership styles and conclude with Culturally Responsive School Leadership as the most appropriate leadership style for leading schools in hyper-ghettoized urban communities.

Leadership Styles

This literature review will discuss four school leadership styles: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and culturally responsive leadership. While the instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership sections

will be rather brief, culturally responsive leadership will be explained at length as a central theme of this study.

Instructional Leadership. Instructional Leadership is a top-down approach to leadership styles that focuses on the principal as the coordinating and controlling center for the entire school (Asa & Brandmo, 2016; Nedelcu, 2013). Instructional leadership acknowledges that principals indirectly influence student achievement while being held directly accountable for student performance. Instructional leaders are also identified as leaders who work directly with teachers to facilitate curriculum application in the classroom (Cuban, 1984; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger, 2005). In working with teachers, instructional leaders focus on improving teaching and learning by focusing on what teachers do in the classroom (Hallinger, 2003).

In line with general leadership behaviors, Hallinger and Murphy(1985) define instructional leadership in terms of what leaders do to determine the school mission and communicate school goals, manage the school's instructional system through teacher evaluation and analysis of student performance data, and develop a positive environment by placing a premium on maintaining the value of instructional time, professional development, and leader visibility in the building.

Due to the relationship between instructional school leaders and the work of teachers in shaping climate, instructional leadership has received notable criticism for being authoritarian, paternalistic, and requiring the blind obedience of followers (Marks & Printy, 2003). Some instructional leaders do not attempt to create a positive school climate that focuses on social-emotional learning and holistic child development; instead,

they focus on developing and sustaining high-quality instruction with the belief that an effective instructional core will inevitably create a positive school climate.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership is a leadership approach that focuses on building a sense of community around healthy relationships, trust, a clear vision, and transcendent goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Transformational leadership aims to build a sense of commitment and capacity around organizational goals so that productivity, morale, and effort are high (Bass & Avolio, as cited in Chemers & Ayman, 1993). Transformational leadership also involves the concept of self-actualization and motivation to inspire followers to work instead of coercing them or relying on blind obedience (Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

Bass (1985) discussed the transformational leader as a leader who focuses their efforts on the four I's- individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Individualized consideration details the leader's capacity to motivate followers with a sense of value and self-worth while recognizing the organization's needs. Intellectual stimulation indicates the leader's commitment to developing followers. Inspirational motivation encompasses the leader's desire to build a community of leaders. Idealized influence depicts the leader's capacity to create and maintain a commitment to the organizational mission. (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, cited in Chemers & Ayman,1993). Bass's conception of transformational leadership expanded to include how school leaders communicate high expectations and elicit participation and various voices in school decision-making (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Principals who lead from a transformational leadership style do not guide curriculum and instruction or monitor learning. In transformational leadership, teachers and other curriculum and instruction staff members lead the work of teaching and learning. Transformational school leaders spend their time engaging the community and other stakeholders to build the capacity of the school and community to accomplish goals (Urick & Bower, 2011).

Distributed Leadership. Distributed leadership is the final leadership style. Distributed leadership is also known as shared-instructional leadership or leadership for learning. This leadership style is understood to detail a synergistic power dynamic shared by individuals throughout the school (Marks & Printy, 2003). The intentional distribution of power involves collective tasks, influences, ownership, purpose, and a sense of collaboration to accomplish goals (Harris, 2013). Leadership for learning extends distributed leadership by exploring how learning is fostered at every level of the school and for all individuals- teachers, students, and the organization- so that collective tasks, ownership, purposes, and goals are more effectively accomplished (Hallinger & Heck 2010). Leadership for learning entails how a school leader intentionally crafts language and processes so that everyone in the school community can take action and interact with others in an authentic and focused manner (Marsh, 2012). Furthermore, leadership for learning focuses explicitly on student achievement and overall school performance (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Leadership for learning includes building capacity throughout the organization while enhancing student knowledge, improving the available resources, and providing spaces where teacher motivation can collaboratively develop and grow individually and

collectively. As a result of this level of collaborative effort, research has indicated that shared leadership has had the highest effect on academic growth (Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2008).

What is true of each leadership style is the acknowledgment that they do not directly influence the teaching and learning that occur in the classroom. School leaders are secondary factors when it comes to learning and teaching, and the interaction between school leaders and learning and teaching is bound to be impacted by the presence or absence of staff and student cultural and racial mismatch.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Culturally Responsive School Leadership is the process of accepting, validating, and valuing the home cultures, experiences, norms, and penchants of culturally diverse and minoritized students. School leaders do this through the embodiment and expression of four essential frames- an ethic of care for the wellbeing of students and their communities; possessing a critical consciousness about the educational system; establishing high expectations for students and their communities; and, consequently, leading change within the educational system through their position. Each of these dimensions is discussed below.

Ethics of Care. According to Ned Noddings (1992), the ethic of care is based on how students perceive the care of those professing to care. Noddings contrasts the claim to be a caring educator with the perception of students that an educator is a caring educator and says that too often, educators believe they care for students, but students disagree. The educator does not just perceive the ethic of care, but it is also felt by the one cared for as the educator attends to their needs and wants. The ethic of care is the foundation of all the work and possibilities that Culturally Responsive School Leaders

possess; without a genuine sense of care and concern, school leaders would reproduce the oppressive, marginalizing, and devaluing leadership practices toward minoritized children (Madhlangobe, 2009). Culturally Responsive School Leaders instill a sense of love and hope into their school communities by focusing on the well-being of their students and the communities where their students come from (Daniels, 2012; Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2004). In doing so, they enter schools with a desire to create caring communities where all parties in the schools learn at high levels (Senge et al., 2012). Culturally Responsive School Leaders communicate their care for communities differently than other types of leaders. Instead of telling the communities what they need, Culturally Responsive School Leaders listen to and value the actual voices of the community. The work of engaging with communities involves breaking down foundational barriers for communication. Culturally Responsive School Leaders focus on demonstrating their care through breaking barriers and honoring home languages, accommodating parent and family lives in school schedules, and intentionally creating spaces where minoritized youth identity can be fostered and nourished (Khalifa, 2012; Walker, 2009). Naturally flowing from an ethic of care is a critical consciousness of the educational system.

***Critical Consciousness*.** Gay and Kirkland (2003) describe an educator's critical consciousness as knowing who they are as people, understanding the context in which they educate, and intentionally questioning their knowledge and assumptions to create environments and policies where minoritized students can thrive. Therefore, Culturally Responsive School Leaders are critically conscious because they are aware of their values, beliefs, and attitudes as they relate to serving minoritized students and remain

aware, vigilant, and willing to question their positions and the way their positions impact the schools (Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gooden, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008). They are also conscious of their culturally situated identity within history and their implicit and explicit biases that must be continuously checked and rechecked to ensure that they are not reproducing oppressive school systems (Dantley, 2005; Furman, 2012; Madhlangob & Gordon, 2012). Khalifa et al. (2004) discuss the necessity of school leaders to possess critical consciousness to examine themselves and the abilities of their staff and students. In this way, critically conscious school leaders avoid excuses for students and staff members and instead place a premium on discovering, pointing out, and rectifying school inequalities (Khalifa et al., 2016). Robinson (2010) explained that critically conscious school leaders possess a sincere love for children and a genuine belief in their ability to learn.

According to Fiedler (1966), critically conscious school leadership is a contingency theory that foundationally guides a school leader's behaviors and actions. The contingency theory posits that school leaders analyze and assess their given school situation before they select which leadership approach they will take. Then, suppose a school leader chooses the path to counter anti-Black racism. In that case, they do so mindful of the context of the specific school they are leading because they understand that those leadership characteristics that are beneficial in one context may be detrimental in another (Bryant, 1998). Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) assert the importance of culture and context related to school stakeholders' thinking, behavior, and practices, which significantly impact the school's needs. Each school situation will fuse diverse students, teachers, and communities to create an unprecedented school community

greatly influenced by how the school leader behaves (Cooper, 2009; Glassman & Heck, 1992; Gooden, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Johnson, 2006; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Lomotey, 1989; Theoharris, 2007).

Therefore, Culturally Responsive School Leaders must be flexible and adaptable in which leadership style they assume in each context, situation, and school. Attempts at universal school leadership styles, behaviors, and practices, without a critical consciousness, can wreak havoc on minoritized student-populated schools because it can effectually perpetuate a majoritarian racist view of Western and White cultural norms, values, and behaviors that are detrimental to minoritized students who do not possess the same cultural norms, values, and behaviors (Hofstede, 1991; Khalifa, Bashar-Ali, Abdi, & Arnold, 2014). Therefore, school leaders must be able and willing to examine and, if necessary, adjust their practices to meet the needs of their school's students, staff, and community (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Slater & Teddie, 1992).

Unfortunately, such a critical reflection is not customary among school leaders (Aveling, 2007; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Lopez, 2003; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Many school leaders are dangerous to minoritized students because they are not critically conscious and reproduce systems of oppression within schools (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). This danger zone is more common when leaders enter situations they were not trained for and are therefore unprepared. Larson & Murtadha (2002) suggests that too often, when school leaders are faced with new situations, they do not understand nor critically interrogate how their typical responses involve standardized or generic behaviors, which are often problematic, and unresponsive, detrimental, and culturally inappropriate to minoritized community needs. However, when school leaders are

critically conscious, they can anticipate what actions they might take that will lead to the success and well-being of their students and establish and maintain appropriately high expectations for schools, students, and communities.

***High Expectations*.** According to Davis (2003) and others, to create caring communities, Culturally Responsive School Leaders set high expectations for all students regardless of whether they are minoritized (Irvine, 1990; Walker, 2009). In this way, Culturally Responsive School Leaders and their staff are considered "warm demanders" who maintain high expectations while providing high levels of support, community, and inclusivity (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Foster, 1997; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ware, 2006). Lindsey et al. (2004) discuss how Culturally Responsive School Leaders also help students understand who they are as unique, competent, and valued members of society and a diverse community instead of minoritized and oppressed members of society. In this way, Culturally Responsive School Leaders strive to improve the holistic development of students.

Singleton (2012) highlights that Culturally Responsive School Leaders play the most critical role in maintaining teachers' culturally responsive practices by recruiting, training, and retaining Culturally Responsive Teachers and ensuring their culturally responsive curricular choices, professional development, and opportunities to guide teachers toward becoming more culturally responsive. Culturally Responsive School Leaders know that students cannot learn from those they believe or feel do not care about them and their culture. For this reason, Culturally Responsive School Leaders advocate for their students by ensuring the educators placed before students care about students' cultures, well-being, and future (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Ladson-Billings (1995) and

others draw attention to the profound impacts that Culturally Responsive Educators can have on their students. Culturally Responsive Educators create spaces of inclusion and exclusion of cultures, well-being, and futures but also students' very beings, their languages, the way they understand, their interests, their families, and the spaces they exist in (Howard, 2003). To do this, Culturally Responsive School Leaders also take appropriate steps to mentor, model, and enforce culturally responsive teaching practices (Gergart, Harris, and Mixon, 2012).

According to Gay (2002), preparing teachers for culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy is necessary regardless of teacher age, race, culture, or socioeconomic background (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2006). All teachers should be coached on culturally responsive teaching; just because teachers look like students does not automatically ensure they will be culturally responsive. The Culturally Responsive School Leader's behavior to lead change also includes attempting to develop teachers who initially are not culturally responsive and may even be resistant to culturally responsive practices (Khalifa, 2013). Suppose these coaching practices do not help build teachers' culturally responsive core. In that case, it becomes the Culturally Responsive School Leader's responsibility to coach the teacher out of the school by helping them realize that the work of culturally responsive teaching is not for them. Culturally Responsive School Leaders maintain inclusive environments, even if it means they have to remove individuals who do not support inclusivity.

Lead Change. Khalifa (2014) researched a highly successful alternative school for Black students. He found that the school leader enacted several policies that contributed to a successful school that can be recreated for immense success. For

example, the school leader eliminated suspensions for cultural behavior such as abusive and vulgar language, fighting, drug use, insubordination, skipping class, and refusal to perform an assignment unless there was concrete evidence of grossly deviant behavior. This limited suspension and exclusion policy created an environment where students were not excluded from the classroom for demonstrating behaviors informed by their cultural capital and association. The school leader joined with staff to hand-deliver school report cards, held weekly "rap sessions'" with staff, students, and parents where they were open to discussing anything related to their lives or education, had quarterly mandatory Saturday breakfast celebrations, and had a yearly bring your parent to the school day. These policies collectively improved the school culture in such a way that led to students desiring to be at school and parents finding it irresistible not to be engaged and communicative with school staff. These policies could significantly improve school culture for economically disadvantaged Black students but would be best instituted alongside a Culturally Responsive School Leader.

Research indicates that merely addressing racial disparities in academics and discipline is not enough to cure the ills of oppressive and racist education. Instead, culturally responsive education is often the most effective route to a more positive school climate and higher academic performance (Ford & Moore, 2013; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The best way to promote this change in schools is when school-level leaders, instead of district mandates, lead that change. District-level mandates are often short-lived, whereas increasing longevity is found in school-based leadership championed causes.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders can cause change by advocating for, understanding, and addressing community values and issues while endorsing overlapping community-school spaces (Khalifa, 2012; Walker, 2009). To do this, school leaders have to earn the trust and credibility of the community, especially the parents and guardians of students, while acknowledging and sustaining cultural and communal wealth to support school improvement and student achievement (Khalifa, 2013; Yosso, 2005). This is particularly important because with Black students because of the historical difficulty Black parents have connected with public schools as a result of the extensive social and racial histories Black families have experienced in schools (Khalifa, 2012).

According to Epstein and Sanders (2006), pre-*Brown v. Board of Education*, Black segregated schools and communities were virtually indistinguishable from each other. As a result of this overlap, schools, communities, and student performance improved and declined together, and there was mutual respect and connection between the two. Post-*Brown v. Board of Education* Black schools became a thing of the past, and with them, the Black families' connection to education. With the elimination of Black schools, the link and overlap between schools and communities were eviscerated as the schools where Black children went to learn no longer aimed to serve Black communities. Black families were thrust into school systems with no voice—a minoritized space.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders can lead change by recreating spaces where the Black communities can be served again. Creating service spaces requires Culturally Responsive School Leaders to possess unique skill sets that allow them to create school spaces that overlap and not just bridge community and school spaces (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012). Khalifa (2012) suggests that communities

include structures, institutions, and relationships in spaces such as residences, churches, stores, restaurants, schools, and other neighborhood settings. When Culturally Responsive School Leaders can demonstrate compassion for their students and communities (Gooden, 2005) by going into communities, bringing family and community members into the school, and placing family community issues at the top of the agenda for school-community partnerships, they make a genuine difference (Khalifa, 2012). Culturally Responsive School Leaders can visit churches, get involved in the fight for the lives and rights of marginalized and abused community children, and most appropriately visit students' homes. In doing so, Culturally Responsive School Leaders do more than bridge gaps between schools and communities. They create overlapping school community spaces that provide holistic educational opportunities for minoritized children— such spaces that have been missing in society since school integration.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders work to subvert White supremacy while liberating and validating oppressed and minoritized youths. In this liberation and validation process, Culturally Responsive School Leaders grant those traditionally seen as powerless and voiceless a seat at the table (Dantley, 2003; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Riehl, 2000; Shields & Sayani as cited in English, 2005; Webb-Johnson, 2006; West, 1989; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010).

Summary

Already a challenge for school communities to locate and hire principals who possess the critical consciousness necessary to be effective in the 21st century, there is an additional burden for urban schools in hyper-ghettoized communities to find school leaders who are all critically conscious of the cultural context of the schools they are

serving. Jacobson (as cited in Bascia, 2005) describes a shortage of high-caliber educational leaders who are critically conscious and adept at responding to the growing diversity in schools. Sergiovanni (2006) suggests that although the focus of successful educational leadership philosophies has shifted, most principals have been trained, socialized, and employed in the traditional top-down leadership approaches or are trained in more shared leadership styles yet consider the notion of shared leadership practically nonsensical and useless. Many school leaders of minoritized communities are not prepared for or trained to address the political and social cultures in which they work or simply place little value in being critically conscious. The result of not having Culturally Responsive School Leaders at the center of urban schools in hyper-ghettoized communities is a school experience where Black children, families, and communities feel unwelcome, detached, misunderstood, and powerless interacting within schools that are supposed to serve them (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994).

Black students, families, and communities have experienced decades worth of these feelings at the hands of racialized oppression and dehumanization in society. Too often, schools have been complicit mediums of this socialization of the young Black soul, but there is hope. School leaders remain primely positioned to lead school change efforts, especially when they are culturally responsive at the core of their identities. Culturally Responsive School Leaders can be the remedy to mend some of the trauma experienced by Black students and, in the process, usher the United States into a place of absolute education equality and equity. While the literature points to Culturally Responsive School Leadership as an integral factor in promoting quality and equitable schools for Black children in hyper-ghettoized urban communities, there are gaps in describing how

individuals become culturally responsive, how they become school leaders, and how their journey accentuated by cultural capital informed the way they carry out their duties and responsibilities. This dissertation is situated precisely within these gaps.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

This study aims to explore the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders and their experiences with cultural capital to understand how they operate within urban schools in hyper-ghettoized urban communities. Culturally Responsive School Leaders occupy the space in schools where they have first-hand experiences and interactions with the school community but are also held accountable to the direction of the district leadership. In this space, Culturally Responsive School Leaders have the power to implement change and maximize relationships with the school community to create the most sustainable and influential reformation. Centering Culturally Responsive School Leadership development, this study will investigate how cultural capital is leveraged to benefit Black students, their families, their communities, and their educational experiences.

This section will discuss the context in which this research study is situated, reintroduce the research questions, then discuss the use of the narrative methodology to

investigate Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Finally, this section will discuss the research data collection and analysis processes.

Research Context

This research occurs in a large Midwest city and its *first ring* of suburban cities. A first ring setting is demonstrative of the cities adjacent to the large urban city. This research site is home to 20 diverse communities and school districts. The research took place in the tumultuous year 2020. The 2020 year was dominated by two significant events- the emergence of the Covid-19 virus and the murder of George Floyd.

In late January of 2020, the United States got its first confirmed case of the Covid-19 virus. Between January and March, Covid-19 cases spiked, causing widespread state lockdowns, school closures, and far-reaching economic devastation. Many students were sent home, parents and caregivers were laid off, unemployment skyrocketed, and the stock market crashed. In response to the impact of the Covid-19 emergence, the Trump administration implemented the Coronavirus Aide, Relief, and Economic Security Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, 2020). The CARES Act was a two trillion dollar boost to the United States economy in the form of $560 billion to individuals, $500 billion to big corporations, $337 billion to small businesses, $340 billion to state and local governments, $154 billion to public health, and $44 billion to education and schools (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, 2020).

Although many schools closed for the 2019-2020 school year, all schools reopen utilizing either virtual, in-person, or hybrid learning modalities for the 2020-2021 school year. The fluidity of these plans placed school leaders in integral positions of bridging state and local direction with community needs, interest, and capabilities. Despite these

efforts, Black communities were adversely affected more than White communities, and school leaders were undoubtedly involved in how the pandemic would impact students and their families.

Also, in 2020, there was the murder of George Floyd. On May 25, 2020, 46-year-old George Floyd was arrested by Minneapolis Police for allegedly using a counterfeit bill. In the arrest process, George Floyd was pinned to the ground by Officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on George Floyd's neck for roughly 8 minutes (Haseman et al., 2020). Despite George Floyd's cries for his mother, crying out for help, crying out that he could not breathe, Officer Chauvin continued to press his knee into the neck of George until he laid unresponsive on the ground. The murder of George Floyd reverberated through the country as protests in the name of George Floyd occurred in all 50 states and around the world (Haseman et al., 2020). In response to the massive protest, many police departments mobilized with force to counter-protest, which led to cries for police reform and defunding on one end and against reverse racism and anarchy on the other.

The murder of George Floyd was one of many deaths of unarmed Black folx at the hands of police or people portending to be enforcers of law and justice. Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Jacob Blake, and Elijah McClain also lost their lives in the year 2020 at the hands of law enforcement. Black communities, especially those in hyper-ghettoized urban spaces, grew boisterous and enraged. A bevy of conversations and dialogues regarding racial justice and implicit bias in our communities spilled into schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to fulfill the purpose of this research inquiry.

1. How do Culturally Responsive School Leaders think about cultural capital in their often hyper-ghettoized urban communities?
2. How do Culturally Responsive School Leaders narrate their school leadership journey?
3. How do the school leaders' journey to CRSL and the way they think about cultural capital contribute to their roles and responsibilities as school leaders?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research employs a construction of knowledge informed by the conversations, relationships, and voices of the researchers and participants, while knowledge is constructed and reconstructed throughout the study (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative methodology was an appropriate choice because it allowed the researcher to investigate the complexity of experiences regarding human and social phenomena and interactions (Galletta, 2013). According to Creswell (2013):

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem…the final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (p. 44)

The three assumptions related to philosophies of science within qualitative research are epistemological, axiological, and ontological. The first assumption is the epistemological assumption, which pertains to that which counts as knowledge and how

knowledge claims are justified. Epistemologically, qualitative research attempts to get as close to the participant as possible to use rich descriptions as the source of knowledge justification. The second assumption is the axiological assumption when engaging the influence of values on the research. In qualitative research, values are integrated into the research process. The researcher makes their position-values and biases visible to create a discourse around how their values influence the study. The third philosophical assumption is the ontological assumption which deals with the nature of reality. Ontologically, qualitative research embraces the presence of multiple realities and attempts to report on the realities.

The qualitative approach was an appropriate choice for this study because it allowed Culturally Responsive School Leaders to narrate their experiences dealing with culture in schools geographically situated within hyper-ghettoized urban communities characterized by cultural mismatch. As opposed to quantitative research, qualitative methods prioritizes contextual significance before universal significance, purposeful sampling as opposed to random sampling, accepts subjectivity as opposed to objectivity, and tolerates a certain level of ambiguity instead of resolving unawareness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative research also uses inductive approaches to create knowledge and center around the researcher as the primary research instrument who enters the field or engages with those in the field to produce a richly descriptive end product.

Rationale for Research Approach

The final philosophical assumption of research is the methodological assumption. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss methodology as a way of thinking and studying reality, including the procedures and techniques used for obtaining and analyzing data.

According to Creswell (2013), the methodological assumption engages in the process in which the research is carried out.

To perform this inquiry, the research methodology I selected was the narrative process. The narrative is the original sensemaking element whereby stories are employed to recall and make sense of our experiences, communicate with others, and understand the world around us (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through narratives, order and importance establish an understanding of larger-scale phenomena while simultaneously providing translucent windows for researchers to examine the cultural and social significance and meaning (Patton, 2002; Pollinghorne, 1988). Hays and Singh (2012) discuss using a narrative to give voice to marginalized groups. In this process of giving voice, the narrative situated individual experiences within a broader social and historical context. In this dissertation, the voices of Culturally Responsive School Leaders were lifted, and their experiences brought into the light.

A narrative is either spoken or written text that gives a chronological account of an event, action, or series of events or actions (Czarniawska, 2004). The text of the narrative is the story occurring in specific places, times, and situations. Thus, the temporality of the story is essential to the text to understand the story's physical, emotional, and social dimensions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Clandinin (2013) discussed the context of the narrative to include familial, linguistic, cultural, and institutional dimensions that constitute, shape, express, enact, and inform the narrative.

Creswell and Poth (2018) provide a procedural guideline for conducting a narrative study. The process begins with the researcher determining whether the research problem or question best fits the narrative approach. Then the researcher identifies the

participants of the story who have the life experiences and stories to tell and immerses themselves in the collection of stories and experiences from the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest observation, journals, collecting letters or other artifacts, official correspondence, and photographs as data collection methods.

During the collection of stories and after the researcher has collected stories, the narrative approach calls upon the researcher to consider how the relationships between the researcher and the participant influence the data collection. As the conversation between researcher and participant progresses, natural turning points, tensions, and transitions within the data collection process must be illuminated as the narrative is developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher-participant dialogue also co-constructs the narrative, meaning, and purpose (Reissman, 2008). This co-construction lifts participants' voices but allows the researcher to influence and guide the narrative. During this process, the researcher begins to situate the co-constructed stories within the experiences, cultures, and historical contexts from which they arose (Czarniawska, 2004).

After collecting stories and interrogating the researcher-participant influence on the stories, the researcher officially begins the data analysis process. In this process, stories are reorganized and restoried into a framework that captures the stories' key elements (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In this analysis phase of the narrative process, the researcher ensures that the study addresses chronology with a beginning, middle, and end of the story along with a protagonist, main character, conflict, plot, values, significance, character mapping, time, struggle and a sequence of casualty (Cortazzi, 1993; Diaute, 2014). In this step of the analysis process, post-modern researchers expose dichotomies, examine silences, attend to disruptions, and explore contradictions.

Finally, the data analysis process concludes with the researcher identifying themes through thematic, structural, and dialogic processes. In the thematic approach, what is said is critically analyzed. In the structural approach, the nature of the storytelling itself is analyzed. The dialogic approach analyzes the audience (Reissman, 2008). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) offer three different methods for identifying themes slightly overlapping Reissman's three approaches. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provide a biographical, psychological, and linguistic approach. The biographical approach analyzes the influence of gender, race, the family of origin, life, events, and turning points in a participant's life. The psychological approach concentrates more on the person, including thoughts and motivations, while emphasizing inductive processes, contextualized knowledge, and human intention. The psychological approach is holistic and acknowledges cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions of meaning-making and biological and environmental influences. The linguistic approach focuses on the language of the story or the spoken text and the speaker's intonation, pitch, and pauses.

The narrative process concludes as the researcher embeds collaborative approaches into the re-storying process. Mishler (1995) states that we do not find stories; we create them. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) echo Mishler by saying that researchers are storytellers just as much as their participants are. The stories are constructed through the researchers' concepts, methods, strategies, and perspectives. Just as earlier phases of narrative research involve collaboration in the interview and data collection process, this point consists of how the researcher negotiates the relationship between researcher and participant so that they both learn from the encounter (Pinnegar & Daynes cited in Clandinin, 2007). This negotiation also emerges because narrative inquiries are

significantly autobiographic. Researchers inevitably draw their interests into the narrative and are shaped by their beliefs and positionality (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In this step, researchers tend to read and reread the text while considering their own story and how their story influences the story's trajectory. For this reason, Clandinin and Connolly (2000) call for narrative studies to be transparent and allow the researcher to discuss their motivation, positionality, and focus continually. This continuous process, known as iterative processes and "back and forthing," encourages the researcher to shift focus from the participant, themselves, the study, the research questions, and the audience. During this stage of the narrative research, validity checks occur as the researcher goes back and forth between the participant and the story to ensure the narrative text is accurate (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

With the narrative process complete, researchers report the narrative and the actual telling of the story. Here, introductions are held, the purpose is clarified, and the research methods and rationale of the story and data collection are noted. Finally, the story is told so that theories can be developed about the participants' lives, the events they experienced, the processes they were a part of, the epiphanies, and the unearthed themes.

Research Paradigms

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest that a research paradigm is a way in which a researcher identifies a problem and the best method for solution. The research paradigm guides how the researcher selects participants, instruments, and general research methodology. The research paradigm employed in this study was the critical realism paradigm. The critical realism framework was initially proposed by Roy Bhaskar in 1978 when he wrote *A Realist Theory of Science.* Bhaskar understood critical realism as the

existence of an independently existing world that gives rise to actual events that do and do not occur. He continues that that which is observed and known can never be pure and unmediated because it is relative to context—time, and culture. Therefore, this interpretive framework acknowledges that reality consists of the existence of real phenomena, actual phenomena, and empirical phenomena. The real phenomena are mechanisms, events, and experiences that do and do not occur. The actual phenomena include those objectives that have the causal power to generate change in the lower levels. Finally, the third aspect, empirical phenomena, is where observations and experiences of the actual phenomena occur. Accepting this interpretive framework as it relates to this study led to acknowledging that the interplay between critical race theory, Culturally Responsive School Leadership, school culture, cultural capital, and cultural mismatch is (1) real in that there are mechanisms, events, and experiences of it; (2) actual in that acceptance that these realities possess the power to produce change; and (3) empirical in that these realities can be observed.

Ontologically, critical realism accepts that the world exists independent of our consciousness, awareness, and perception of it. Epistemologically, critical realism acknowledges that our understanding of this world independent of us is constructed from our position and therefore constructed from our specific perception within time and space, acknowledging that it is theoretically impossible to attain a single and correct view of reality (Maxwell, 2011). Axiologically, critical realism is value-laden, primarily as a result of the critical nature of the paradigm. Although critical realism researchers attempt to minimize their bias and subjectivity, they are also aware of the undeniable interplay between the researcher and their research.

Critical realism is then aligned with social constructivism in the study. A Social Constructivist seeks to understand the world in which we live and work. When combining critical realism and social constructivism, the researcher's approach to construction is accompanied by an awareness of the fragility of such knowledge. Critical realism asserts that knowledge is understood as the best we know right now. Combined with social constructivism, it allows a dialogue to produce the best description and understanding of the knowledge that can be generated.

Recruitment, Selection of Participants, and Sampling Plan

Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were chosen to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling begins with the purpose the researcher has in conducting research. Purposeful sampling then intentionally selects participants to study and learn from (Merriam, 1998). Twelve school leaders were chosen from a large midwestern school district and adjacent districts. The criteria by which school leaders were recruited and selected were presented to each school through email using the areas' School Leader Consortium. The requirements consisted of the following qualities: (1) official school leader holding the position of principal or assistant principal, (2) perceived by district leadership or other school leaders as being culturally responsive, and (3) leads a school building characterized by cultural mismatch between the culture of the staff and culture of the community. Snowball sampling was also used to locate participants when purposeful sampling did not develop the needed saturation or number of participants (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). While interviewing participants, the researcher asked participants if they knew anyone who fit the criteria for inclusion in the study and might have been interested in participating in the research. After each participant was identified,

they were sent an invitation email including an informed consent form, a description of the study, and a request for potential interview dates and times.

As a school leader in one of the districts in this study and being involved in the First-Ring School Leaders' Consortium, the primary researcher possessed access to multiple school leaders in the area. Using these access groups, they could identify district leaders that could serve as filters to identify Culturally Responsive School Leaders.

Data Collection: Interview Protocol

The primary tool of data collection was the 90-minute semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview was chosen because of its ability to address topics related to investigating the experiences and development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders while providing the researcher and participant space to discover and propose new meanings (Galletta, 2013). As the research instrument, the researcher acknowledged their natural propensity to encourage conversational tangents and follow interviewees down different paths in the process of lifting meaning from participants' experiences. The semi-structured interview provided the researcher the opportunity to ensure that there was a form of structure to ground the interview. In the semi-structured conversation, the questions were in-depth exploratory questions that provided space to probe participants' answers and connect them to ideas in search of meaning and importance.

The semi-structured interview started with an introduction and was broken into four portions, each of which included multiple interview questions: The first three sections of the interview were based on each research question: (1) Leadership Journey, (2) Cultural Capital, and (3) Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Cultural Capital. The final section included questions that situated the leader's story in the context

of racial unrest and Covid-19 during the 2020 calendar year. The semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix A.

After obtaining the transcription from a professional transcription, a copy of the interview transcript was sent to the respective participants for an opportunity to clarify, elaborate, or correct any information provided. Providing each participant a copy of the interview also allowed for a secondary follow-up interview. After checking with participants and the transcripts were deemed accurate, analyzing the data began.

Data Analysis Procedures

The primary method of analysis was coding. A code is "a word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence- capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual" (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). The initial step in identifying codes is to hand-code while a professional transcription service transcribes the interview audio file. Hand coding comes from the orthographic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Hand-coding is particularly beneficial when researchers want to collect data and meaning from the rich dialogue of messy and everyday talk (Reissman, 2008). Messy and everyday talk is the language that friends would use, the style of speech absent from traditionally professional spaces.

In the coding process, the researcher performed first and second-cycle coding. In the first coding cycle, the data were thematically coded through direct methods, and each sentence's or response's central concept was coded. As these codes were created, they were combined with In-Vivo codes, whereby specific words from the interview and documents were lifted and used as a code until a robust data set was developed (Saldana, 2013). The second coding cycle included the more complex and analytical coding

processes, including “classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building” (Saldana, 2013, p. 68). In this second coding cycle, themes were generated by combining specific codes. Then, these themes were further grouped to create more interrelated themes. Finally, abstractions and generalizations were generated from the inter-related themes (Creswell, 2012).

Although coding is an irreplaceable form of data analysis, reflective and analytical memoing are equally important. Memos are places where the researcher ‘dumps their brain’ about their thoughts about the participants and the stories they tell (Saldana, 2013). A memo is a conversation the researcher has with themselves about the data (Clarke, 2005). Immediate and constant memoing allowed the researcher to collect the emergent patterns, categories, themes, concepts, and assertions in networks of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Memoing also allowed the researcher to track biases, presuppositions, and prejudgments throughout the project to bracket their values and understand how they impacted the research.

Positionality and Reflexivity

One of the primary characteristics of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Critical theories assume that “the world is informed by structured power relations based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability, or religion” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 62). In light of the power structure's influence on relations, it is vital to consider insider/outsider status, positionality, and reflexivity. Each of these aspects will be discussed below.

Insider/outsider status refers to whether the researcher is part of the studied community. The studied community in this research endeavor is the Culturally

Responsive School Leaders community. Identifying those who were part of this community was conducted by peer and supervisor recommendation, whereby school leaders were identified and recommended by their peers or supervisors as culturally responsive leaders. As a school leader who has been recognized by both district leaders and other school leaders as culturally responsive, the researcher possessed a significant degree of insider status in the study. Due to insider status, access to participants and having shared experiences with participants more readily led to trust-building and more authentic conversation.

Positionality refers to one's "race, gender, social class background, and sexual orientation—particularly concerning the study purposes" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 63). When the researcher's positionality matches the participants, developing trust and obtaining access is often more natural. In many ways, the researcher's positionality as a Black male school leader performing this research should enable building trust. However, there were non-Black participants in the study with whom the researcher's positionality became more influential in how the data was collected and analyzed.

To deal with the complexity and complications that result from positionality and insider status, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend a constant process of reflexivity. According to Probst and Berenson (2014), "reflexivity is generally understood as an awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher. It is both a state of mind and a set of actions" (p. 814). The process of reflexivity includes the researcher owning the effect they have on the research process due to power dynamics. The research practically incorporated reflexivity into this qualitative study by bracketing their biases,

assumptions, prejudices, and predispositions through analytical memoing and journaling through the data collection and analysis process.

Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) refer to trustworthiness as the extent to which credibility and transferability are achieved in the research process. These measures are applied to both methodological and interpretive means. Methodological trustworthiness applies to the application of the methods, and interpretive trustworthiness refers to how we judge outcomes (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This section will discuss these aspects of trustworthiness and how they were accomplished in this study.

Credibility

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), establishing credibility answers the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is really there? Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring (p. 242)?" Qualitative researchers focused on credibility must keep in mind that data cannot speak for itself, it must be interpreted, and there must be an interpreter, the process of observing or measuring a phenomenon changes the phenomenon being measured and observed, and that words are representations of reality but not reality itself (Ratcliffe, 1983). One of the methods to accomplish credibility is by employing triangulation or crystallization. Triangulation is when multiple measurement points are used to converge on a single data point to establish its credibility (Denzin, 1978). For this study, triangulation occurred using numerous data sources and theories. Twelve research participants' views and experiences with Critical Race Theory, cultural and structural

forces, cultural and social capital, and Culturally Responsive School Leadership were used in triangulating/ crystalizing the data (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002; Richardson, 2000). Another strategy for obtaining credibility was the incorporation of member checks in the study, whereby the researcher solicited feedback on initial findings from the interview participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks ensure that the data interpretation "rings true" for participants. When the interpretations do not, adjustments and modifications can be executed to obtain a more credible understanding of the data to ensure biases and misunderstandings are minimized. Finally, the last strategy to establish credibility was ensuring saturation was reached, which required interviewing twelve participants.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the study results and their ability to transfer to another setting. Transferability in qualitative studies is vastly different from transferability in qualitative studies because qualitative studies are not meant to produce similar results in other locations. The transferability in qualitative studies is not something that the researchers seek to do. Instead, the researchers must make it their goal to provide sufficient descriptive data so that transferability is possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, one of the methods for obtaining transferability is through the use of generating a rich, thick description. A description is rich when it provides abundant, interconnected detail (Stake, 2010). To produce rich, thick descriptions, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend devoting time to revisiting raw data as soon as possible after data collection to add further descriptions to assist in data analysis. Another method of achieving transferability is achieving maximum variation in selecting the study sample.

Maximum variation is significant because it allows the researchers to document the diversity and common patterns and themes across diverse participant groups (Patton, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

To address ethical concerns and considerations, the researcher protected participant identities through privacy and confidentiality by storing all information in a locked location and constantly monitoring participant reactions during the interview to remain aware of emotional responses as indications of potential risk throughout the process. Additionally, pseudonyms were generated based on the participants involved (Hays & Singh, 2012). Unfortunately, the size and history of the chosen location created occasional challenges in protecting the confidentiality of the participants. However, by hosting the interviews virtually, confidentiality was maximized. Additionally, whenever possible, information was presented so as not to reveal the participants' identities. Additional ethical concerns included avoiding siding with or leading participants, disclosing information that would harm participants, respecting participants' privacy by using pseudonyms, and researcher competence (Creswell, 2012).

The first check for ensuring an ethical approach occurred through securing IRB approval. The researcher gained Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent to conduct research. The IRB application included information about the participants' rights and the research process, including any consent forms. The details of the IRB outlined the researcher's intent, the study's purpose, the participants' rights, the potential risk of entering the study, the respect for privacy, storage of data, and confidentiality of all participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2005). Participation was sought on a volunteer basis,

and informed consent forms were submitted before their interviews. The informed consent allowed the researcher to demonstrate responsibility and transparency (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Finally, privacy was ensured as all audio files, and consent forms were locked and stored securely. Transcripts were stored on a password-secured computer. The details of this process were all provided by the approved IRB.

Summary

The purpose of this section was to outline the use of qualitative research methods to investigate the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders. This section discusses Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework, the use of the narrative to explore the development of the Culturally Responsive School Leaders, their leadership journey, and how cultural capital influenced the roles they assumed and their responsibilities.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Theorizing that Culturally Responsive School Leaders right the wrongs of generational, educational neglect and oppression due to cultural mismatch and deficit mentalities, the purpose of this study was to explore the development and manifestation of Culturally Responsive School Leaders in predominantly Black, hyper-ghettoized urban communities. Black schools in hyper-ghettoized urban communities traditionally operate as complex community systems built on the sophisticated exchange of cultural capital amongst many stakeholders that maintain a racist stratified society. However, Culturally Responsive School Leaders have an innate, developed, and effective ability to interrupt the status quo and elevate Black students, their families, and their community. At the helm of predominantly Black schools found in hyper-ghettoized urban communities, Culturally Responsive School Leaders are liberators of the Black mind who take personal responsibility for earning the trust between the school and the community, expanding their safe spaces, and chartering transcendent school reform (Voohis & Sheldon, 2004).

To fulfill this purpose, this study employed the narrative inquiry process to ask the following three research questions:

How do Culturally Responsive School Leaders think about cultural capital in their often hyper-ghettoized urban communities?

How do Culturally Responsive School Leaders narrate their school leadership journey?

How do the school leaders' journey to CRSL and the way they think about cultural capital contribute to their roles and responsibilities as school leaders?

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from in-depth interviews with twelve current school leaders around their life and career histories to develop a narrative of how they became Culturally Responsive School Leaders and how their experiences of school leadership are manifestations of cultural responsiveness. The table below depicts each participant's demographic information:

Table 1: Description of Participant

Participant Number	Gender	Race	Years of Teaching	Years of Administration
1	**Male**	**Black**	**7**	**6**
2	**Female**	**Black**	**7**	**7**
3	**Female**	**Black**	**10**	**5**
4	**Female**	**Black**	**4**	**5**
5	**Female**	**Black**	**13**	**5**
6	**Male**	**Black**	**14**	**6**
7	**Male**	**White**	**8**	**4**
8	**Female**	**Black**	**3**	**12**
9	**Male**	**Black**	**3**	**3**
10	**Male**	**White**	**5**	**6**
11	**Female**	**White**	**13**	**5**
12	**Female**	**White**	**11**	**7**

Each of these participants was shaped by their journey to school leadership and the experiences on their way. Many of these experiences were positive and sparked a

desire for them to emulate what they saw or chase a dream that aligned with their experiences. However, participants had less positive experiences, such as interactions with loss and injustice, discrimination and abandonment, and detriment and deprivation, that equally set them on their path to cultural responsiveness and school leadership. The narration of these experiences in an urban region in the Midwest, highly influenced by the Covid-19 global pandemic, formed the codex of themes from which the answers to the research questions emerged.

During this study, several seismic national and global events occurred that formed the conditions from which this study arose- the Covid-19 Global pandemic, School shut-downs, and the murder of George Floyd. While participants only occasionally referred directly to these factors, they influenced how schools operated during this study. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the global Covid-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and was first detected in the United States by January 2020. By March, the CDC had declared the Covid-19 Virus a Global Pandemic, and President Trump had announced the National State of Emergency. Over the next three months, Covid-19 would cause death for over 100,000 Americans while countless others were without employment, as the employment rate plunged to rates not seen since the Great Depression (CDC).

In March 2020, to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus, governors across the country suspended in-person learning, leaving school districts, educators, parents, and most importantly, students without one of the single most stable forces in their lives— school— at a time when stability was needed most. In many school districts, this suspension lasted until January 2021, when districts across the country initiated hybrid

learning whereby groups of students alternated being in the building for traditional in-person learning. In light of these unprecedented, unpredicted educational changes, schools, educators, and students were left to figure out how to make the most out of the tough times and modified school year.

Halfway through the 2020 calendar year, the world erupted with footage of the murder of George Floyd at the knee of Minneapolis experienced police officer Derek Chauvin. For over nine minutes, George Floyd's airway was blocked. He begged for assistance and cried out for his mother while Derek Chauvin refused to relent. The nation erupted in protest. National uproar included the scrambling of institutions, legislative bodies, companies, and organizations to display solidarity with the plight of Black folx-school districts included. State boards of education released anti-Racism memos, school boards proclaimed their commitment to racial inequality, and educators and laypeople sought books, articles, and training to ensure their districts, schools, and classrooms were free of racial oppression.

With the global pandemic, school closures, and the murder of George followed by political demands of racial justice in the background, three major themes emerged from the interviews with each participant: a) Being, b) Becoming, and c) Doing. The first theme- Being, surfaced in the reflective nature of participants navigating historically oppressive institutional systems while simultaneously engaging with students, families, and communities to end educational oppression. The second theme-Becoming, highlighted the process that each participant experienced throughout their lives that caused them to develop their lens for cultural responsivity and how each participant found their way to their current position as a school leader. The third theme- Doing,

emerged as school leaders discussed how they operate in their role as school leaders and focused intently on what the participants do as school leaders.

The table below lists the dominant themes and subthemes and describes each subtheme.

Table 2: Description of Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Being- *The beliefs that CRSL have about themselves as it relates to their identity as Culturally Responsive School Leaders*	Critical Authenticity	*Heightened recognition of who CRSLs were and how their identities impacted their work*
	Naïve Relegation	*Occasionally, there were moments when participants relegated their cultural responsiveness to typical school leader behaviors while simultaneously demonstrating characteristics that conflicted with being Culturally Responsive*
Becoming- *The process by which each CRSL developed their cultural responsivity and became a school leader*	Family Influence	*The influence of CRSLs' families that were North Stars for them, guiding to Culturally Responsive School Leadership.*
	School Experiences	*The kindergarten through high school experiences of CRSLs that act as safety guard rails along their vocational journey.*
	Collegiate Pursuit	*The various college experiences and pathways CRSLs took to arrive at education.*
	Secondary Career	*The journeys that certain CRSLs took to discover/recover their passion for education after college.*
	Teacher Leader	*The lifting of CRSLs to leadership positions while still in the classroom that would catalyze the next step of school leadership.*
	School Leadership	*The process by which CRSLs officially stepped into school leadership positions.*
	Leadership Training	*The training opportunities that participants would take to prepare themselves for leading schools*
	Professional Growth	*The dedication CRSL had to grow as a professional within and beyond their current positions*
Doing- *The actions and*	Injustice Awareness	*An intimate understanding of the generational injustice, trauma, and*

behaviors that CRSL engage in as school leaders		*oppression experienced by Black students, families, and communities*
	Family Relationships	*The building of relationships with families that was permitted after families knew they could trust the participants*
	Student Advocacy	*The central element of a CRSLs' role and responsibility is to champion students.*
	Confronting Opposition	*Equipped with an awareness of injustice, alongside families to advocate for students, this subtheme describes how, when, and where CRSLs opposed those who opposed their kids*
	Uplifting Staff	*The support that CRSLs established to make sure that staff were at their best so that students received the best possible educational experiences*
	Lasting Change	*The systems that CRSL changed when possible, deconstructed when necessary, and built to create sustainable educational change*

Being

Ironically, despite all participants in this study eluding to the doing the work of Culturally Responsive School Leadership, most were also hesitant to accept the distinction that came with it. In fact, despite receiving extensive training for school leadership, success as school leaders, and their alignment, lens, and embodiment of cultural responsiveness, elicitation was required by the interviewer during the interview for them to connect their leadership practices to cultural responsivity. In fact, for many participants, it was through their involvement in the reflective nature of this research study that they had the opportunity to consider their identities as school leaders and whether being Culturally Responsive was part of who they were. This theme is best understood concerning the following subthemes: Being Authentic and Naïve Relegation.

Critical Authenticity

Reflecting on their journeys to Culturally Responsive School Leadership, one of the most central tenets of their identity, roles, and responsibility was being *critically authentic*. This is the first subtheme from this theme. Everything these school leaders are and do stems from a critical dedication to show up in every room and engage authentically in every interaction. Participant 1 championed authenticity when he recalled telling his students, "we live in this space, and we don't turn off who we are to make other people comfortable." Participant 11 echoed this notion when recalling how she received feedback from some of her mentors that she did not have enough edge and was concerned about whether she would get walked over as a school administrator. To her, part of what it meant to be Culturally Responsive was being true to herself and having enough backbone to be authentically herself.

For Participant 8, critical authenticity came from her race and her gender. She explained,

> I think, Black women always do this. We become somebody's mama. Like I could step into a room, and I am a caricature of the Black mother. So there are some things that I'm not gonna experience sometimes because I'm walking into a role as a Black woman.

She was fully aware of the benefits that she experienced as a Black woman, as "somebody's mama." One of these benefits was being a confidant, which meant being a safe space for those around her, both those who reported to her and those to whom she reported. She articulated, "I often find that people want to confide in me. Um, leadership would want to confide in me."

Conversely, Participant 2 was aware of the nuance of being a Black woman. She realized she wasn't just a black woman but a middle-class, young Black woman. She was

aware that how she showed up in rooms was primarily a result of how she was evolving, what she was experiencing, and how her intersecting identities and vantage point impacted her. For Participant 12, she played the role so well that one of her students called her mom in front of their mother.

For participant 6, as a Black man, he could not be anyone's mother, but he could be a brother, a role he was very comfortable playing. He explained how he wanted students to talk about him, "He's cool, but he gets on me cause he's my big brother. I can't stand him. He's my big brother. He loves me." He leveraged the man he was to be the most influential and impactful school leader he could be. Participant 9 took the commitment to school personally when he clarified, "I embody these characteristics by being authentic and, [I'm] very straightforward to everyone that I'm not here for adults. I'm here for the kids. I'm here to make sure that these kids go to high-performing high schools. That's my mission." For him, there was no pretending or exaggeration. The only thing at play was whether the school leaders were authentic to their abilities and aspirations.

Another aspect of being critically authentic was how Culturally Responsive School leaders eliminated the barrier between work and home. For Participant 1, "There is no separation between my life and my work…I share my fraternal life. I share my wife…my grandmother made breakfast for the staff. My mom comes. So, you know, all those things tied to the man that I am." Participant 1 also enrolled his son in the school he led because he authentically valued his leadership over the quality of education his son could have received in a different school. Participant 11 also broke the barrier between home and school by bringing her daughter to the school to tutor, mentor, and befriend struggling kids.

Naive Relegation

Becoming a Culturally Responsive School Leader was part of a lifelong journey, according to participants, involving family, friends, and community members, and taking place in homes, schools, places of worship, and other social institutions. While only a few participants seemed shocked to be identified as Culturally Responsive, most were caught off guard by the recommendations of their peers that they were Culturally Responsive and struggled to see how their leadership styles and behaviors were anything unique. This conception that they were doing nothing special codified the second and final subtheme, *naive relegation*. Primarily, this subtheme describes the lack of awareness some participants in this study had about the terminology of cultural responsiveness. Additionally, it captures how some participants relegate their Culturally Responsive leadership behaviors to conventional school leadership tendencies. Similar to Gloria Ladson-Billings' argument for Culturally Responsive Teaching in an article partially titled "But that's just good teaching," some participants considered their Culturally Responsive school leadership behaviors, practices, roles, and responsibilities, as *just good school leadership*. It is as if being a Culturally Responsive School Leader was an awarded title school leaders only realized they had if they paused doing the work of a Culturally Responsive school leader long enough to grasp the esteemed currency they received from their students, families, and communities and leveraged this to reshaped educational environments and experiences.

Some participants accepted their cultural responsivity as an aspect of their identity so integrated into who they were, that regardless of their career, they would operate similarly. Participant 1 said, "All those things [are] tied to the man that I am" and that it

"is reflected in everything I do." Participant 2 said, "it is difficult for me to not be Culturally Responsive, um, because a part of who I am." Participant 7 said, "Really much of what I do is just who I am." Participant 8 said, "that's what I come with; with who I am." Participant 9 says it best when he says, "I think it's just me, you know if I wasn't a school leader, I'd be a Culturally Responsive lawyer or a Culturally Responsive doctor. Um, I think it's just who I am."

For others, they were more cautious about considering themselves "Culturally Responsive." When Participant 12 was asked when they realized they were culturally responsive said, "I mean…I guess now." For Participant 5, she addresses this hesitation by stating, "I'm such a young school leader…I don't even know if I've ever, really said to myself, like 'You're just a really Culturally Responsive leader.'" Participant 6 shared this caution but was unclear on where the caution originated. When asked when he realized that he was Culturally Responsive, he stated, "I don't know if I ever have…I don't know if that's humility or just not wanting to…I haven't arrived anywhere to be considered to have any type of adjective put on that." Participant 11 took this notion further, saying, "I think I'm realizing it and working on it every day. I think I'm doing ok with it, but there's always more to learn and grow."

There was also an element of *ordinary* that the school leaders lifted. Participant 5 said,

> I *just* feel like I do things that are the right thing to do for kids, families and teachers…I just make decisions that focus on outcomes for students. But also remember that I was a teacher, and so I always try to leverage like…' is this a doable task for teachers' because if I overwhelm them, nothing ever gets done.

Unfortunately, this code does not speak to just naivety. Some of what this code captured were the ideas and stories that conflicted with Culturally Responsive School

Leadership. For example, Participant 7 acknowledged that despite being fully aware of how society, students, families, communities, and school staff were in the midst of a racial storm, he had not yet broached the conversation of race, racism, and police brutality for concern of steering children in a direction that their parents did not want them to go or killing a kid's dream of becoming a cop. Then there was Participant 12, whose accounts occasionally conflicted with those traditionally aligned with Culturally Responsive school leadership; however, they seemed to be aware of this conflict when they said, "I think really trying to be like maybe being culturally aware versus like being Culturally Responsive." They acknowledged that despite turning over more than half of their school staff, there was (still) little to no racial diversity amongst the staff and claimed that incidents of racial injustice and police brutality did not impact their schools.

This first theme, Being, elevated nuance to how Culturally Responsive School Leaders identify themselves in light of the roles and responsibilities they play in schools and communities. All participants were aware of and articulated how the intersectionality of identities impacted their work- including their race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class, albeit to different degrees. Participants also engaged with the title- Culturally Responsive School Leader, with humility and caution as though aware of the magnitude of weight associated with championing cultures that are too often left to fend for themselves. Participants demonstrated this critical consciousness as they negotiated their identity, primarily due to the constellation of past experiences and encounters that shaped them. This constellation of experiences and encounters forms the second code- *Becoming.*

Becoming

The second theme is the holistic development of these participants and how they became Culturally Responsive School Leaders. Participants in this study did not become Culturally Responsive School Leaders overnight, nor was there a class or program they took that transformed them into the individuals they would become. Instead, from the moment the participants were born, their families, friends, and community members coalesced to shape and influence their development and journey as Culturally Responsive School Leaders. Additionally, their experiences at home, in their neighborhoods, community events, schools, and at school events formed the foundation by which each school leader's worldview would be established.

An adage asserts that educators choose education for the outcomes they create in others, not the incomes they generate for themselves. Thus, choosing education as a career and vocation is never accidental but accentuates the arch of each participant's life story. Some participants were illuminated to their path's education destination while in grade school. Others became aware of their calling in college, so they studied education, whereas others took the scenic route to education after becoming aware of the misalignment in other academic programs. Still, others would not find their home in education until after a different career left them disenchanted, but they would eventually find their home in education.

While most Culturally Responsive School Leaders chose to be teachers, leadership found them when it came to being a school leader. The journey to school leadership was not as intuitive as the journey to becoming a teacher. While all adolescents have direct interactions with teachers, very few could say the same about a

principal or other school leader. More often than not, these interactions were reserved for disciplinary issues and problem-solving. A principal's position is an ominous one, often cloaked in more obscurity than aspiration, so the step from teacher to leader was sometimes a surprise, a cajole, or a detour for participants. However, each participant's dedication to education demanded they seek opportunities for training and development to maximize the impact they would have on children.

The second theme-Becoming- is best understood through the following codes: Family Influence, School Experiences, Collegiate Pursuit, Secondary Career, Teacher Leader, School Leadership, Leadership Training, and Professional Growth.

Family Influence

The first subtheme of Becoming is *Family Influence*. The families of Culturally Responsive School Leaders were the *de facto* determinants and influencers of how they would develop. Participants articulated their family's impact on their development as educators and school leaders. Some participants recalled specific and poignant family experiences that were so seismic that they single-handedly set them on the path to Culturally Responsive School Leadership. For other participants, the impact of their families was summarized with statements of the collective familial experiences that prepared, positioned, and encouraged them in ways that would serve as North Stars on their journey to Culturally Responsive School Leadership.

One such seismic moment is captured by Participant 3 when she recalls the moment her grandfather and pastor called her to education. Out of respect to her elder and spiritual leader, she answered the call at 14 by accepting a Sunday School teaching assignment and would continue answering that call to becoming an elementary school

principal. Participant 8 would have a similar life-changing moment when on the verge of dropping out of high school after getting a 1.3 GPA her senior year. Her uncle came to her and made her promise him that she wouldn't drop out but that she would graduate. Refusing to let down those who lifted them, these participants agreed to journey into unchartered territory.

An example of a North Star that would guide a Culturally Responsive School Leader is explained by Participant 1 when he describes growing up without his father in his life. For him, the absence of a father left a void that he spent his life yearning to fill; a void for which he would constantly question how his life would have been different had this void not existed; a void from which he works tirelessly to make sure his students do not experience the same. He knows he cannot be their father, but he can be the father figure for them that he never had, and this pursuit guides his work in how he teaches the young men at his all-boys school how to be young men.

School and Community Experiences

Outside the home, beyond the family, poignant influencing factors formed the frame and foundation of Culturally Responsive School Leaders' development. One such location outside the house is the school. Schools shape students, who become adults who find careers and have children, and then shape schools and the experiences of future generations of children. The impact of schools on the development of Culturally Responsive school leaders formed the second subtheme: *School and Community Experiences*. For some participants, schools were sites of positive experiences, which caused them to desire to recreate the environments that created them. For others, they

considered schools to have failed them, which placed the kindling within them that would be used to ignite a fire and change the system

Participant 1 reflects on positive school experiences by stating, “The safe space for me growing up was school, and so you can get lost in a book, you can, you know, thrive. And so there is no, you can't pick sides, you can't show favoritism, you know, um, as it relates to how someone is performing. So I always thought about it as the great equalizer.” By contrast, Participant 8 tells a school experience story where she says,

> I get to high school, and I just started leaving and doing crazy stuff. And it was really, I really put my mother through a lot of stuff. And so I got kicked out of, um, Urban High School Eight for truancy.

She got expelled, did an extra year of high school, and graduated with a 1.5 GPA.

Participant 2’s story captures both positive and negative aspects of school experiences. She contrasts her own experiences in middle school with those of her cousin and says,

> I was college preparatory track, and then my cousin was on this like other track where they were just kind of treated as like throw away children. Um, and at that time I didn't have any pedagogical knowledge at that point, but I just knew in my gut, that was not right.

She and her cousin were raised by their grandmother, but her cousin lost his father to sickle cell anemia at three and witnessed the murder of his mother at 4. His childhood was traumatic, and he found no safety in school. Meanwhile, his cousin, Participant 2, received a high-quality education. Whether positive or negative, the experiences that Culturally Responsive school leaders had during their k-12 education would be foundational in their leadership journey.

Collegiate Pursuit

There were three different collegiate pursuits that the Culturally Responsive school leaders took to arrive at education: studying education from the first year of college to graduation, switching to education from another degree program after a period of disenchantment, and pursuing education through a Master's degree following a career. This *collegiate pursuit* was the third subtheme from the Becoming theme.

Participant 3 tells the story of the first pathway of always knowing education was her destiny by recalling that the moment Participant 3's grandfather commissioned her to be a Sunday School teacher, her course was set. So after high school, she naturally went to college for education. The same can be said of Participant 2, a classically trained teacher who knew from high school that she wanted to be a teacher. The benefit of identifying their purpose this early meant that these participants would go to college for education and begin teaching right up to graduation.

The second path of discovering a passion for education in college and switching majors can be seen in the recollection of Participant 1, who stated, "I went to HBCU 1. Um, my degree is in early childhood education. And so I initially, I actually started off as [an] applied physics major." Participant 10 also was a science major in college but knew that he wanted to be an educator, so although he had changed his major, his career aspirations remained the same; he wanted to be an educator.

Finally, the third and final journey initially involved a career outside education. Several participants took this path, including Participants 4 and 9, who ended up in education after their first career. Both participants discussed being part of Teach for America, which finds non-educators and places them in urban classrooms for a minimum

of two years. Participant 11 discussed how although they initially wanted to be an educator, their first career after college was not in the classroom. “I ended up in higher ed working at the university level for about six years and, um, it was back in, um, 2003. I was like, you know what, higher ed is not for me. I want to get back to my teaching roots.”

Teacher Leader

Seven participants recalled being teacher leaders before they were school leaders. They were not typical teachers that fulfilled their duties and responsibilities as outlined in their contract. Instead, they went above and beyond and were recognized by their peers and supervisors for doing so. Such dedication and professionalism to their craft gave participants additional roles and responsibilities to promote student learning, community engagement, and school maintenance. These leadership roles and other job responsibilities elevate participants from teachers to *teacher leaders*, which would be the fourth subtheme. Becoming teacher leaders would further equip and prepare each school leader for school leadership in indispensable ways.

For example, Participant 4 described having virtually every role in a school, from financial management to food services, Title One funding, human resources and recruiting, operations, and clerical work. Participant 8 discussed being called upon by the principal to develop and lead school-wide outreach activities for students and families. However, Participant 7 captures the essence of becoming a teacher leader when he describes his elevation into leadership by saying,

> I was lifted into leadership roles throughout and really, what made me make the leap into school leadership was other people's belief in me. Um, so once I began to get into leadership roles, I, I really think that like I sought those out after that

> moving forward, because I knew that… for me to have a greater impact in the district that I was in was to become a school leader.

This *lift* was echoed by Participant 6, a young, local and vocal, charismatic, intelligent Black male entering a career dominated by White females and a school full of Black and brown children. He recalled being lifted into leadership even before he stepped foot into a classroom of his own. Immediately after being hired, he was asked to join a team developing a first-of-its-kind school program. He found value and prestige when recounting this program. He says,

> Just walking into my first experience immediately [I] sat down at the table and…took ownership and took leadership, um, and pouring out my ideas of what a school should look like, what we should do, um, scheduling things like that. So that was my first experience, even before I went into the classroom, um, was leading other teachers so much to the point that the principal…made me team leader.

School Leadership

Unlike becoming teachers, which most Culturally Responsive School Leaders discovered was their destiny at a young age, becoming a school leader was not something, few participants had ever dreamed of doing before. Becoming a school leader was also dissimilar from being a teacher leader as it required a completely different set of skills and centered on close interactions with adults, not children. Nevertheless, each participant said yes to *school leadership*. The journey to this commitment would become the fifth subtheme because it captured and uncovers how participants came to say yes to school leadership.

Concerning how participants became school leaders, there were two primary catalysts for their journey into school leadership; one was a participant's internal desire for school leadership, and the other was aligned with the previous subtheme whereby

participants became school leaders because of others. Three participants knew early in their careers that they wanted to be school leaders. For Participant 10, he realized the desire to be a principal in high school when he took a Myers-Briggs assessment. He said, "Myers-Briggs…said that I'd be a good high school principal. And I thought about…my high school principal, how he interacted with students, and how he was there for students. And it's just something that I, I aspired to do." Then there was Participant 4, who knew she wanted to be a principal because she perceived that the principals with whom she had worked weren't good. She explained her interest in school leadership by stating,

> I mean, to be honest, I kind of had some administrators I worked at and especially in a charter school that often administrators in our charter school aren't [good], they didn't really go to school to be administrators. They don't have the credentials and experience…I just feel like this is something I innately knew I wanted to do…leadership.

Participant 11 shared a similar sentiment, although her desire for leadership did not materialize until she was a nine-year teaching veteran. She stated, "I thought I wanted to do something more and have a bigger impact. Um, outside of the four walls of my classroom." Participant 5 recalled that same desire to impact as many kids as possible when they said,

> I never wanted to be a teacher for 40 years…[As a teacher], I can only impact 25 kids a year…with the choices that I make. Being a principal, I can impact hundreds of kids every single year. So that's exactly what I was looking for.

Then there were participants like Participant 7, who enjoyed being a teacher and never imagined being a school leader. They shared, "I started off as an intervention specialist, um, and I just envisioned myself really just doing that work. Like I did it, I loved it. I was going to continue doing that." Participant 8 also began their educational career as an intervention specialist and, similar to Participant 7, did not initially want to

be a school leader; instead, she proposed that school leadership "organically happened." As she started taking educational classes, she became more interested in school leadership. She reflected on that time in her life by saying, "I then decided, this is something I want to look into, but I never really decided that it was something I was going to do. It was like, 'Oh, I'm gonna have this in my back pocket.'" Participant 4's desire for school leadership happened organically after a course on the work of a Turn-around Specialist. She learned about how Turnaround Specialists are intentionally positioned in urban environments for three to five years, where they use high leverage strategies to increase the school's academic performance. She was moved by the ability to improve the educational experiences of kids "that look like me, or they look like my nephew, or they look like my nieces." And from that experience, her path to school leadership would be sure. Finally, there was Participant 2, who was asked to phase out a school when the current principal had taken his talents elsewhere. Participant 2 was not planning to be a school leader, but she took a one-year assignment. The one-year appointment was followed by a second offer for another one-year assignment phasing out another school. Following two phase-outs, Participant 2 decided that she wanted to try to lead a school that was stable and found a head principal position at a Westside High School, where she would spend the next four years.

Leadership Training

Upon participants' excelling at teaching, becoming teacher leaders, and saying yes to school leadership, aspiring school leaders needed to obtain the necessary pre-requisite training to become school leaders. There are a few pathways to school leadership in public education: a traditional university-based licensure program and an

alternative district-facilitated training program for educators who possess Master's degrees. Although these two pathways have the same aim in preparing educators to be school leaders, their methodologies and results couldn't be more distinct. Some participants partook in traditional licensure programs; others went through district-facilitated alternative routes to school leadership. In comparison, traditional licensure programs center classroom instruction and push practical hands-on experiences to the periphery. Most alternative programs center on-the-job training and supplement those experiences with classroom instruction. Culturally Responsive School Leaders' journey for *leadership training* formed the last subtheme of the first theme of Becoming.

When contrasting a traditional licensure program to the district-established alternative route that most participants were part of, Participant 7 advocated for the usefulness and preparation he found in district-facilitated alternative routes and said,

> I completed [State University Two]'s principal's licensure program. And, um, what I'm going to say is not a knock on that program. It would be any program, right…Just reading case studies and doing work around other people's school leadership didn't really prepare me to be an urban school leader.

The particular district facilitated training program for Participant 7 placed a cohort of aspiring school leaders in a summer intensive classroom experience followed by a yearlong on-the-job training where each aspiring school leader was paired with a seasoned local school leader who would be their mentor. This intensive program challenged aspiring school leaders in ways traditional programs were inept. Especially Participant 12, who claimed that as a result of the training program, she questioned and reaffirmed who she was as an individual, an educator, and a leader.

In addition to identity formation, the cohort and mentorship were essential in the journeys and development of most participants. Despite most participants' dedication to

education, they often found themselves without peer support. That is why the cohort aspect of the district-facilitated training program was largely successful. When recollecting the impact of the cohort, Participant 4 said, “I'm happy that I had a group of individuals who were extremely supportive because they too also helped shape my understanding of what school leadership is and what school leadership should not be.” Participant 9 echoed the importance of a cohort when he described how important it is to have people around him who knew where he was coming from and had the same mission as him because they would understand him when others did not. For him, where the training program had failed, his cohort did not; instead, they stepped in to support him. The support, camaraderie, and friendship amongst school leaders are what has been affectionately called “princi-PALS.”

Being placed with a mentor for a year was another element of the district-facilitated training program that participants appreciated and noted contributed to the program’s effectiveness. Participant 5 recalled how grateful she was to have her mentor, who provided insight into school leadership and the school district that she would have never gotten on her own. For others, like participant 4, having a mentor was a source of feedback and advice, such as “Keep the main thing the main thing.” But not all seasoned school leaders made good mentors or role models. Some participants saw examples of what *not* to be from their mentors, like Participant 3, whose mentor wore her emotions on her sleeves and often cursed in front of her staff, occasionally in front of children, and once refused to let students enter the building because the security officer had called off. No substitute officer had arrived to check students’ bookbags. From leaders like this, participants learned more about what not to do than behaviors to emulate.

Professional Growth

Once established in the seat of school leadership, participants buttressed their essential roles or responsibilities by pursuing *professional growth* and maturing as school leaders. Professional growth is the final subtheme. Although growing professionally and being life-long learners is an expectation of all school leaders, it is often considered something most school leaders engage in out of duty, not opportunity or affinity. On the contrary, Culturally Responsive School Leaders are not merely satisfied with their current knowledge, capabilities, and skills. Instead, they must pursue opportunities to advance and improve their leadership. Participant 2 articulated this pursuit when she sought out the local YWCA for training that she could not find anywhere else. Culturally Responsive School Leaders constantly pursue growth.

Participant 5 performed a similar pursuit when she spent time looking for videos about the importance of cultural identity and responsiveness for herself and her staff. She recognized that she had a responsibility as a leader to confront her fear by learning about people she did not know, even if doing so made her uncomfortable and required her to have hard conversations with adults. She understood that having hard conversations was part of her job and that becoming an effective communicator required her to know and understand others.

Participant 1 realized that despite having been led by a sense of purpose, cohesion, and direction in the past, he was called to something he had yet to identify yet felt strongly that he should pursue. He recognized an uncomfortable lack of clarity and direction in his professional future after realizing that he had applied to three unique job opportunities. Participant 1 realized his lack of clarity and focus and responded by taking

a step back. He describes his response by saying, “I want to do a fast, a two-day fast and meditate; really start thinking about how do I prepare my mind and walk more intentionally and purposefully into one direction.” Participants in this study were no strangers to advancement and improvement. In fact, advancement and growth are part of who they are.

The second theme- Becoming, details the amalgamation of influencers, experiences, and circumstances that created North Stars for the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders. The North Star ensured that school leaders’ journey led them to cultivate a lens, embodiment, and alignment to cultural responsiveness while securing their school leadership career. Each participant’s journey consisted of the necessary tension of clarity and quandary, surplus, and scarcity. It brought them from diverse beginnings to similar positions of school leadership in hyper-ghettoized urban communities that needed them. How they operated in these similar positions is detailed in the next theme- *doing.*

Doing

Once school leaders found themselves in the school leadership capacity, it was time for them to elevate doing the Culturally Responsive work they had been doing for their classrooms and small groups to impact the entire student body, school families, and community at large. As school leaders, participants were not simply cogs in the wheel of public schools but were operating the proverbial wheels of public education for Black students. In this capacity, school leaders either solidified their concern as Culturally Responsive school leaders for the development and success of Black students as

Culturally Responsive School Leaders or continued the system of oppression and denigration of the Black community by maintaining the educational status quo.

While the second theme, Becoming, explained the identities of Culturally Responsive school leaders and how their identity developed, the third theme, Doing, unearths the behaviors of Culturally Responsive school leaders and how they speak life to power for Black communities. The third theme is best understood through the following subthemes: Injustice Awareness, Family Relationships, Student Advocacy, Confronting Opposition, Uplifting Staff, and Lasting Change.

Injustice Awareness

Culturally Responsive School Leadership began with an *awareness of the injustices* experienced by students, families, and communities; this is the first subtheme from this theme. The lived experiences of Culturally Responsive school leaders equip them with insight into the injustices Black communities have experienced within and beyond the walls of public education. These experiences gave them the cultural capital to exist with students, families, and communities intimately. Often participants share origin stories with the students, families, and communities they serve and therefore have first-hand knowledge of the injustices they experience. For other participants who did not live the lives of Black youths in hyper-ghettoized urban communities, they found overlap in their own lived experiences with which they could empathize with the Black community they served without sympathizing for them and looking down upon them.

Some of these injustices include the story told by Participant 9 comparing resources and respect afforded to a West side school, where the Black population is a

fraction of that on the East side. Specifically, Participant 9 observed the West side school community having access to support after a murder occurred near the school community.

> I remember working on the West side of Urban City One…at a very diverse school, and there was a murder in the neighborhood. And that next morning, there were grief counselors at the school to help scholars who needed it. I've worked on the East side for four years now, and there's been murders all the time, different places, different times. And I have yet to see a grief counselor, not one. And so it's a matter of deservingness…some people think we deserve less, and a lot of it is adults' behavior, um, adult thought processes that eliminate the empathy when they think about our kids and us.

Participant 9 would continue to make his point by stating that he felt district leaders had less empathy for Black children than the non-Black children, who were all *de facto* segregated on different sides of town. He discussed knowing that no child deserved to be educated in the conditions in which Black children are educated. The existence of such educational conditions exclaimed to students, families, the community and those who frequented the schools, that they were not deserving of high-quality educational experiences. Yet, thousands of Black children were in deplorable school buildings, receiving a sub-par education beneath the terrifying injustice of inequitable and punitive disciplinary policies.

Participant 9 continued to discuss how the injustice was historical and flowed rather naturally from *Brown v. Board of Education* when he said,

> We were fighting to be integrated into the schools, um, that were designed for kids who didn't look like us. And when I say that, and I continue to say that historically, our district has done a terrible job of educating Black kids.

He continued by proposing how educational injustice can plague generations by stringing together a series of possibilities:

> Mom does not have a high school diploma. So her value on education is probably not the same…She probably had a terrible experience with school, and I noticed people, parents who've had bad experiences in school. They often are very

> disrespectful to the teachers, whether they met [them] before or not, just because they have the title "teacher," that'd be very disrespectful to the principal, whether they met them or not, because they've had a bad experience with principals before. And that's their traumas. Their trauma is when they hear that word principal, they think of somebody who is demeaning or somebody who did them wrong, or kick[ed] them out of school or suspended them.

For Participant 3, she connected the history of injustice back to the experiences of Emmett Till, a 14- year-old Black boy murdered in 1955 after an innocent interaction with a White woman. For her, it was necessary to empower students to make good decisions despite the inequities they would face. In response to injustices, she told her students, "So what are you gonna do? Are you gonna get kicked out of class every day? Like, no, we're not about that life. Like y'all need to work twice as hard." This statement was followed with a deep sigh as if to immediately remember the weight still on her shoulders, a weight that all Black folx shared in their struggle for a happy, healthy, and whole life.

Participant 2, on the other hand, understood the injustice beyond the school's educational walls by discussing the city's racial separation. She even discussed some unspoken truths about safe and unsafe parts of town for Black folx. Such realities, though not collectively discussed aloud, were intuitively known from the collective histories of Black folx. Another example of the collective histories and wisdom of Black folx that Culturally Responsive School Leaders were intimately attuned to was the tension and conflict between Black folx and law enforcement. Participant 1 recalled civil rights protests in response to the death of unarmed Black folx at the hands of brutish police officers, including Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Jacob Blake, and many more. His understanding of the injustice of law enforcement was also deeply personal, as he recalled being arrested in seventh grade after being accused of throwing

rocks and jumping train tracks. The trauma inflicted by those officers who arrested two kids in shirts and ties and drove them downtown was the kind of trauma at the center of national and local protest. Police officers who do not live in the community and have no intimate connection with the community consider it their job to put kids in their place and are oblivious to the trauma their behaviors inflict. Participant 10 tapped into this shared persistent frustration with law enforcement officers by saying, "This isn't new…This is something that has been screamed for decades about the interaction from predominantly…suburban White cops who have mostly been separated from urban people of color." Experiences within and beyond the school walls are chockfull of injustice, and Culturally Responsive School Leaders are aware of these injustices.

Relationships with families

Disarmed of deficit and victim-blaming mentalities by an awareness of the injustices experienced by students, families, and the communities they served, Culturally Responsive School Leaders were invited to the proverbial table where they were able to build *relationships with families*, and this is the second subtheme of Doing. Awareness by Culturally Responsive School Leaders of the unjust lived experienced by Black folx signified to families that they could be trusted to sit at the table and peer behind the veil of the Black public persona and begin bonding with the authentic yet guarded Black community. This space at the table, with the ability to see behind the veil, was typically reserved for refuge and renewal. Still, because they could be trusted, shared knowledge of lived experiences was accessible to the leaders who families knew possessed an awareness of the injustices they faced.

Participant 1 was aware of this table. He said school leaders must be conscious of the politics of the community, which included being present and treating the school like home. Treating the school like home meant giving *sweat equity* to it, a term developed by motivational speaker and former star Tennessee football player Inky Johnson. Participant 1 understood his responsibility and obligation to labor for the school, regardless of how old the building was, its condition, or the perception of the building among those outside of the community. His hard work needed to translate to literal sweat that would serve as equity that granted him engagement and respect from the community, the families, and the students. He stated, "I respect this space, no matter how old the building looks…I would give sweat equity into this intimate space…so that when I leave…[it] is still valued, considered valuable." By doing so, he spoke in a language the community understood and knew they could trust him.

After peering behind the veil, Culturally Responsive School Leaders began to double down on who the families and communities were and how they felt about kids. For participant 12, it was affirming that her students were "someone's baby and they send us their prized possessions for us to do right by them," but not only that, but that "they all want the best for their baby...[even though] they may not know how to support them or what resources to get." Participant 4 would echo parents' desire when saying, "no parent wants their kid to fail. Um, they just don't always know what to do to help their kid not to fail."

Culturally Responsive School Leaders knew that each family had a story, and that it was improper to judge a family because of how they responded to the things that happened in their lives. Not only did the participants acknowledge the assets and virtue in

families, but they also empathized with and humanized the struggles, deficits, and vices some families engaged in. For example, Participant 11 recalled a transformation she experienced with one of her favorite students and his mother:

> I used to blame parents for stuff too. You know, like their parents not doing what they need to do, or, you know, he has a bad mother or whatever, but when loving him made me love his mother and appreciate her and help her and understand where she came from and where they were living and what was happening. And it changed my whole life and ideas.

Participant 11 got to know the story of her student and his mother and concluded that he had a Harvard mind but was born into a community college family. Nevertheless, she could not judge his mother because she was doing the best she could, like all other families.

Participant 10 shared a similar story. He recalled two cousins who sold drugs; one had brought a gun to school, and the other had brought a medicine bottle full of marijuana to school, yet he refused to label and identify the two students as *bad kids.* He held back tears as he spoke about them saying "They were kids that had made choices based on the things that were put in front of them." He then recalled a moment in a senior seminar class when a student with disabilities spoke about the struggles that he went through with his mom and how they struggled to eat and how they struggled to find housing. Then the two students who were too often mislabeled as *bad kids* took their own money and brought their struggling fellow classmate a jacket, socks, gloves and two new pairs of shoes. Participants in this study acknowledged the vices around students, families, and communities but were equally aware of and emphasized stories like this that carried redemptive power to counter those quickly condemned behaviors.

Participants in this study knew that certain realities for their students, families, and communities were easy to condemn but refused to do so. Another area where participants refrained from criticizing students and families was student attendance. At the height of the Covid pandemic, while schools across the country were doing remote learning, Culturally Responsive School Leaders recognized that some students were never in attendance. When thinking of one particular student, Participant 12 recalled that their technologically illiterate grandmother was raising them. As if that was not enough, while the student was facing the everyday child struggles of learning and coming of age, puberty, and peer relationships, they were also facing struggles caused by generational poverty and institutional racism- an incarcerated father, an absent mother, seeking shelter in temporary housing through Section 8, and having witnessed a shooting in the community. Participant 12 was fully aware of the importance of attending school, but considering the entourage of trauma in the student's life, they refused to judge them or their family. Participant 9 acknowledged that some families have to go to work all day and either can not sit with their kids during the day or have to send them to less than competent daycares that were unable to ensure all their kids were online.

Participant 4 had a very insightful position on remote learning work. She started by questioning why the district even required assigning grades in the global pandemic. Then she began to explain how she struggled to ensure her son turned his assignments in on time. Even as a school leader, who is home all day, works on a computer, and has a smartphone, she also found remote learning challenging. She developed the empathy to understand that if she struggled to support her child with remote learning, her

expectations of family members who were not trained educators to be successful were inappropriate.

Student Advocacy

Flowing from an awareness of injustice and building relationships with families, Culturally Responsive school leaders all felt a significant responsibility to advocate for students. This *student advocacy* was the third subtheme from this theme. Culturally Responsive School Leaders advocated for students to their supervisors- Superintendents and other district leaders and their subordinates- teachers and other school staff. It was as if the school leaders took personal responsibility for their students' success or failure and advocated for them to make sure they did everything they could to ensure student success. Holding back tears, Participant 4 said, "I do this job….every day. It's never about me…I just do it to help kids" Participant 6 articulated the importance of recognizing students' humanity, saying, "People are People." Advocating for students meant more than advocating for their educational value because being a school leader who is Culturally Responsive means caring about who students are from 8 am to 4 pm but also who they are from 4 pm to 8 am. When thinking about one of his students, he said,

> [he's] not just a third-grade student, you know? He's not a score. He's not a means to me getting a check. Like he's a person, and he's got a family, and he's got a mother and…what does he deal with when three o'clock hit, you know, he's got to get home. He gets cold. He gets hungry.

Student advocacy also meant that Culturally Responsive School Leaders believed in the exceptionality and potential of Black students. Participant 4 would describe the asset-based beliefs instead of deficit-based beliefs when she acknowledged, "Um, the most important thing that I've learned about students is that they're resilient… they can

rise to any occasion. We just don't give it to them…We set limits on their learning, and therefore they set limits on their learning." Participant 10 was aware of this potential and took the time to get to know his students. For example, he realized that although he was used to automatically receiving respect as an adult in his community, he had to earn it at work. But instead of protesting this reality, he spent time understanding it. He realized, "I was told you respect adults, and that was confirmed by the vast majority of my interactions with adults." However, his kids had too many variants in their interactions with adults. As a result of these variants, students did not just respect adults because they were older. Even adults had to prove that they were trustworthy and that they cared about kids, "whether it's a parent or a family member or a, uh, a significant other, or a neighbor or, uh, a sibling's friend, or just someone random on the streets… [students declare] 'You have to prove it to me. You have to prove that you care about me.'"

Participant 7 spoke of fighting the good fight for kids and creating opportunities for them to succeed. Participant 5 spoke about making sure kids felt seen, heard, and valued by doing the small things- saying their names right, making sure they can see themselves in the adults in the building and the books on the shelves, asking their opinions, listening to what they have to say and making sure they know they matter, their thoughts matter, and their words matter. For Participant 11, genuinely listening was critical. She explained,

> I actually took the time to listen, even if they just was bold-face lying or just making absolutely no sense, um, or dealing with their own mental health. I literally would sit there and listen, and they would tell me any kind of story, but I always…listened to students.

She would even listen to opposing sides of gang feuds and had come to earn the respect of the youth. With such respect, no harm would ever come to her because she now had

“dragons in the building.*”* These dragons, former students whose trust and protection she had earned, would come to her aide at sporting events and handle situations where students were misbehaving.

Confronting Opposition

The natural result of the Culturally Responsive School Leaders' awareness of injustice and relationships built with families was a focus on improving the lived educational experiences of Black students, Black families, and Black communities. Therefore, Culturally Responsive School Leaders were aware that “educating kids is a battle worth fighting, caring about kids is a battle worth fighting” because they affirmed, "These are our students, and this is our clientele and who we serve…Our parents are sending us what, the best that they have…[and] we are responsible for them.”

Participant 9 describes this responsibility for the educational experiences of his students, families, and communities by lowering the number of low-performing students at his school when he says,

> Their education is dear to me because I know the possibilities and the doors that will open when you have a great education. And I also know the outcomes for kids in this city who do not have that same opportunity. So it is in my mind, life or death. So I really want to put as much effort and time into helping scholars get on track for reading and math, and just increase their love for learning.

However, participants needed to confront opposition within and beyond the school, whether that opposition came in the form of ill-intentioned or well-meaning family members, teachers, district administrators, or community partners that maintained the educational status quo. The act of *confronting opposition* is the fourth subtheme of this theme.

Occasionally, there were times when Culturally Responsive School Leaders opposed the same families they were serving to improve their students' lives and experiences. One such example was captured by Participant 4 when she described pushing for students with emotional disturbances to be coached out of their intensive behavior classrooms. Before these interactions, families thought their students were supposed to remain in the intensive classroom until graduation. Participant 4 believed that doing so would detriment the students and prevent them from succeeding in spaces beyond school where intensive rooms and accommodations would not be provided. Another example occurred when a mother insisted that her children not participate in virtual learning at the height of the pandemic due to her fear of ineptitude with technology. Participant 9 reaffirmed that teachers were teaching and students were learning and that they would continue with virtual learning and expected that all students would be present and engaged.

Most often, Culturally Responsive School Leaders found themselves opposing teachers and other school staff who intentionally or unintentionally impeded the progress of Black children. Most teachers genuinely cared about their students, but without an awareness of the injustices experienced by students, their families, and communities and without the relationships to contextualize the injustices, they took the role of *White saviors*, who did more harm than good. Participant 1 understood this savior complex and poignantly opposed it. He refused to accept the circumstances of Black students and their families as a reason to lower expectations. Instead, he preached the need for more effort to combat the detrimental realities and experiences of students within and beyond the school walls. He explained,

> Sometimes we allow the kid's circumstance to allow us to lower the bar for them. And that, that is never a thing for me... I see the circumstance that you are in, but what can I do to help you walk more successfully or to be more successful in this space...I understand that there is this barrier; these are the things that I will do proactively to make sure that I can mitigate those barriers to fully prepare you.

Likewise, Participant 3 got emotional when describing a similar reaction to White staff feeling sorry for Black kids. She said with tears in her eyes, "I don't want them to look down at them. I want them to see that they have a story. Know the impact of that story. Know the trauma behind that story, but still, empower them to do their very best." Participant 3 would echo this confrontation by recalling, "At the end of the day…our students still have to grow. Like, I don't want this pandemic to lead to a bunch of excuses… I really want to push for excellence, even in the midst of this new normal." For Participant 1, he was also clear in establishing that the growth of students could not be reduced to the capabilities of staff. Advocating for students meant they had every opportunity to experience the highest quality education they wanted and not be limited by staff.

While lowering expectations was one behavior that Culturally Responsive School Leaders opposed, they also opposed behavioral responses by school staff that were detrimental to Black students. Participant 9 eloquently stated, "You have to understand what it means to suspend a Black boy." So naturally, Culturally Responsive School Leaders protect kids from and oppose staff who continue the status quo of disproportionately kicking Black kids out of class, quickly writing referrals on Black kids, and recommending suspension for Black kids.

Nevertheless, Culturally Responsive School Leaders confronted opposition wherever they encountered it. On the rare occasion, there were also times when the

opposition school leaders faced came from their supervisor. When recalling joining a family in a protest against community gun violence after losing a child and student who attended the school, Participant 7 recalled being told by her supervisor not to get involved, especially after the district had requested that the protest move to another location. The principal disregarded the request of his supervisor and marched arm in arm with the student's mother alongside other staff. He was willing to accept discipline for standing up for his beliefs. Participant 9 recalls a similar opposition story when he decided to be his school's fourth and fifth-grade math teacher when their teacher was out. His supervisor advised him to get out of the classroom and do administrative tasks, but he refused because he believed in the urgent need for quality math instruction. Finally, Participant 1 gave his Superintendent an ultimatum- "him [a classroom teacher] or me" after recommending the termination of a teacher who stopped their car in the middle of the street on their way home after school to confront a student who had been disrespectful during the school day. They could not find a substitute to manage the responsibility of educating students while ensuring they remained safe. Here is how he recalled the situation, "Me recommending termination and the union, not doing anything to protect our students but more so protecting [the] bargaining member. And I remember like literally telling our leader that it is either me or this teacher." Culturally Responsive School Leaders stuck to their morals of doing what was right for kids and were willing to risk their careers and livelihoods to serve that purpose.

Uplifting Staff

Participants also acknowledged a dual focus as school leaders. They prioritized confronting those who stand in the way of Black academic progress and improving the

educational experiences of Black students. However, participants also narrated that it is equally essential to uplift and support those staff members on the front lines who commit to fighting for Black students, Black families, and Black communities. As Participant 9 explains, “I can't be everywhere…I only have as much power as the teachers allow me to.” *Uplifting staff* is the fifth subtheme from Doing. To uplift and support the school staff committed to Black Educational Thriving, school leaders first needed a sophisticated understanding of their role and responsibility as school leaders.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders realized it was their responsibility to listen to their staff, as suggested by Participant 11, when they acknowledge the mistake that school leaders sometimes make when they “come in and just want to turn everything upside down right away.” Instead, they learned, "You have to be quiet and listen, and really listen to what people say, because most people are willing to work and learn and change. Even if it's hard.” Participant 11 also knew that learning about the school staff does not happen overnight; instead, it is understood interaction by interaction from the day they walked into the building. They just had to have the discipline to wait for an opportunity to have the interaction.

They also accepted the need to speak in ways the staff could trust consistently. Participant 8 recalled how knowing and constantly communicating her values caused even the most challenging staff to get on board with what she was doing. She talked about how she began a program of unit recovery where if a student failed the quarter, they had an opportunity to recover that quarter with work and assistance from their teacher. At first, teachers were dismissive and communicated deficit messages about the

program and students who took advantage of it. Eventually, these same teachers began to take advantage of the program. She articulates,

> [Teachers] would be failing a student and come to me behind the scenes and say, I need you to help this student. I'm willing to do this for them if you can get them to do this…But they had to keep up their reputation…in their class for all the students. But they'd come behind the scenes, literally give me the stuff like this is the test we [are] about to do. I need you to make him study.

For Participant 4, she recognized her need to build trust by keeping her word, celebrating and thanking her staff, enlisting feedback, leading by example, and maintaining a smile. She was willing to do this even to her demise. She tells the story of the time a parent threatened her with a gun in the parking lot during dismissal. Participant 4's school had a policy where students were not permitted to be released from school for the last ten minutes of the day. This meant that any parent who came to pick up there child within 10 minutes from the end of the day had to wait. On one particular day, a parent was unhappy with Participant's 4 commitment to the rule and began shouting and screaming in the school. Participant 4 recalled, "I just said, ma'am, this is not tolerated. You are going to have to leave either…voluntarily, or I'm going to have to have my officer put you out. And she was like… That's okay, I'll see you in the parking lot." Naturally, when dismissal arrived, Participant 4 went to the parking lot and saw the parent and recalled "she had her service weapon and she had not unholstered the weapon, but she had removed it from her hip, put it in her hand and told me to come here. And I said, ma'am, that is a threat, and you're on school property." Reflecting on the situation, she acknowledged, "Ninety-five percent of my staff does not know that…because I essentially protected them from it… I protected the kids from it…I did not allow the situation at the time to show that it really affected me."

Participant 4 also discussed how she met weekly with a teacher who didn't have the technical skills necessary to place her lesson plans and instructional materials online for students. In this instance, she entered the teacher's assignment despite receiving criticism from colleagues that said she was enabling the teacher not to fulfill her job responsibilities of placing her lesson plans and instructional materials online. Participant 4 ignored the criticism and continued supporting the teacher because she did not believe that children and families should suffer because a veteran teacher could not use technology, especially during a global pandemic. She was sympathetic to the reality that her teacher had never had to utilize technology as expected, and Participant 4 did not want students to suffer because of it.

Understanding the pressures of Covid was another primary way Culturally Responsive School Leaders uplifted staff; they extended unprecedented grace during an unusual time. Participant 9 recalled talking to their staff about self-care, minimizing stress, and saying, "[If] you can't do your job, take a day off because I want your best." Participants refused to lower their expectations for Black students, Black families, and Black communities but also refused to lower their expectations for the educators who served them. Instead, Culturally Responsive School Leaders increased the support that they provided and were explicit about it. For Participant 8, she described this level of support as being a *soft landing* for staff like she had so often been for students.

Lasting Change

The sixth and final subtheme of this theme is *lasting change*. Culturally Responsive School Leaders are consciously aware of the systemic prowess of public education to maintain racist, oppressive, and societal norms. Therefore, they are

dedicated to improving the Black educational experience in enduring ways and committed to reshaping present systems and cultures so that the changes their efforts would spawn would outlast their tenure as the school leader and extend beyond the school building.

One significant barrier to remote learning during the Covid-19 shutdown was ensuring that students attended their classes. Participant 5 realized an attendance trend emerging in her school- students did not return to class after lunch. However, instead of criticizing her students for not logging back onto their computers after lunch, she talked to staff and families to evaluate the feasibility of moving lunch to the end of the day so that after students had lunch, they were done with school. She was not sure whether the change would influence attendance nor if there would be additional unintended consequences. Still, she acknowledged, “We're seeing a problem and trying to find a solution. I don't think every problem has such a seamless, beautiful solution, but I don't think we're at a lack for trying.” Participant 5 also performed functional system changes when he used $30,000 to select a new reading curriculum for students and revamped one of their systems of support for students. He also led one of his student support teams to change when and where they provided academic interventions for their students. He noticed that too often, students were receiving interventions once they had been removed from general education classes and placed in special education classes. To avoid this practice, he began requiring the implementation of academic interventions in the general education classroom before switching a student’s learning environment to a more restrictive special education classroom. This change meant that Participant 5’s staff would not be able to check a box asserting that an intervention was being implemented;

instead, there was a genuine expectation that the intervention was successful, and there was a system of accountability in place for assurance.

Participant 2 discussed cultural changes when she described the need for educators within the school she leads to believe in kids. She explained how she spent three years building the staff culture to the point where the staff had finally become a reflection of her. Ironically, despite the staff being a reflection of her, she had also given them autonomy and ownership of the school. She discussed the arrival of three new staff members, one of whom was struggling. Here is how she described the new system in place to engage with this struggling staff member.

> What is interesting about this year is I'm not the one that's challenging this [new] person…It's everybody else. It's teachers, you know, texting me. Like, I don't know if you know, so-and-so's [is] going to make it here. [Then I'm] reaffirming to them, like, "This is your school. This is not my school. This is your school. You, and don't make it easy…cause if you make it easy, if you compensate… this person is going to think that it's okay."

Participant 9 changed the culture in her school immediately by changing the aesthetics of her school. She knew that she despised schools that did not feel like schools where students were free and encouraged to be kids. She explained, "Uh, I really created a free environment here, free as possible…I did not want it to feel like a prison…I don't want anybody being yelled at…I'm not a big fan of all straight lines, hands behind the back."

The third theme, Doing, articulated the work that Culturally Responsive School Leaders engage in due to the identities that developed from the second theme, Becoming. Participants' awareness of the experiences of Black communities, families, and students within and beyond the classroom catapulted them into deliberate action to change the trajectory of the Black urban educational experience.

Summary

This research study aimed to explore the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders in predominantly Black schools located in hyper-ghettoized urban communities. This exploration extended from an inquiry of how the participants in this study perceived cultural capital, narrated their school leadership journey, and how the roles and responsibilities they assumed were influenced by their journey to school leadership and understanding of cultural capital.

The major themes that emerged from this study were *Being*, *Becoming*, and *Doing*. These themes chronicled the development of each participant as a school leader considered Culturally Responsive, articulated their daily endeavors as a school leader and how they interact with students, families, communities, and other educators. Ironically, most participants expressed hesitation and resistance to the "Culturally Responsive School Leader" title and being considered a Culturally Responsive School Leader. At times, their reluctance was due to their unfamiliarity with the title. In contrast, at other times, they possessed an esoteric reverence for the title and its perceived esteem when working with the Midwest Black cultures of hyper-ghettoized urban communities and the families and children that live in them.

These themes also capture participants' family origin stories full of individuals and events with such magnitude that upon reflecting, they could trace decades of experiences to their current role as an educational leader liberating the minds and souls of Black children. They shared their own educational experiences, including their experiences as classroom teachers, which often resulted in them being lifted into school administration by their supervisors. This lift solidified their path and emboldened their

resolve to champion Black thriving. As school leaders, participants were finally positioned to respond in systemic and expansive ways. Still, the impact of their response was tethered to the relationships they had built with Black folx. Thus, participants expressed deep relationships with Black children, families, and communities that informed their responsibility to champion Black Educational Thriving. Participants championed Black Educational Thriving by accepting the call to counter the perceived status quo of Black Inferiority through confronting those within and beyond the educational system who opposed the authentic progress and success of the Black student, family, and community. Participants also acted by supporting, encouraging, and uplifting those who were advocates and allies of Black Educational Thriving. Together, these themes chronicled the development of each participant and the way they committed to *repairing* the relationship between the school system and the Black community, *restoring* the public trust in the ability of the school system to provide equitable quality education to Black children, and *rectifying* the Black educational experience with urgency, potency, and permeance so that Black Educational Thriving would become the new status quo.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

> *Tens machine has these little pads, and you can put them on your back, and it gives a sense of electric shock to your muscles, and it makes them contract, you know, it's used for therapy. So, in a sense, I feel like I am connected with the people, connected with the culture, because when the people hurt, I hurt, like, I feel the same thing…So just as a tens machine is connected to somebody's body. And the body is responsive to the tens machine; I think I'm responsive.* - Participant 6

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders as they set out to right the wrongs of the Miseducation of Black Youth. This miseducation, resulting from racism and oppression, has been facilitated by public educational institutions and the institutional agents they employ to establish and distribute cultural capital to the Black students, families, and communities they *pretend* to serve. To achieve this purpose, this study examined the histories of Culturally Responsive School Leaders and how these school leaders fulfill their duties and responsibilities in their respective schools. As the above quote from Participant 6 suggests, cultural *responsiveness* required connection: connection with Black folx, the Black community, and Black culture but also the connection to one's self, one's history, and one's hope for a future. The concept of connection emerged as this study's most

urgent and pivotal theme on the development and urgent need for Culturally Responsive School Leaders. In fact, connection replaced capital as one of the central foci of school leaders engaging in Culturally Responsive ways.

As this chapter formed in an attempt to discuss the meaning and implications of the results of this study, a tension developed in the ways that Culturally Responsive School Leaders engaged Cultural Capital or instead did not engage with it. It seemed as if the participants in this study embodied the understanding that [cultural] capital was one of the "master's tools" (Lorde, 2007, p. 112) that would never succeed at dismantling the master's house— a socially stratified society in which Black children, their families, and communities were second-class citizens, disenfranchised, and disregarded. This understanding of Cultural Capital aligned with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, in which cultural capital is a signifier of attitudes, preferences, pieces of knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials that are rewarded in school and society and can be exchanged for and [if desired] used to block access to particular assets, privileges, and opportunities (Bourdieu as cited in Richardson, 1986). However, the participants in this study refused to equip students, families, or communities with the signifiers deemed necessary for students to receive access to assets, privileges, and opportunities. They refused to perpetuate racially implicit pedagogy by demanding from Black students that which was given to White students and used to denigrate Blackness (Bourdieu, 1977); in fact, they demanded nothing of this sort from their Black students. Instead, they responded to their connections with students, families, and communities by equipping school environments with the appropriate tools to receive and champion the signals students, families, and communities sent. Instead of indicating to their students, families,

and communities that they did not have Cultural Capital unless they resembled the school culture, they reformed the school and the school culture in the image of the students, family, and community. They championed who their students and families were, not who the White- male-dominated middle-class culture demanded them to be.

This tension around Cultural Capital and the Culturally Responsive School Leaders' decision not to employ it within schools and distribute it to students formalized this study's second conclusion. However, I began with it here because it served as a linchpin by which the other two findings were established. As participants spent time reflecting through dialogue in the interview and our co-construction of knowledge, they also revealed two different central conclusions about Culturally Responsive School Leadership. The first conclusion was that participants in this study spent their entire lives developing into Culturally Responsive School Leaders. In fact, for most participants, cultural responsivity was so embedded into their identities that they were often oblivious to its existence. They did not take a class to become Culturally Responsive.

Moreover, their experiences with educational leadership programs typically consisted of permutations of the same dominant and oppressive *instructional* knowledge and practices they sought to dismantle. The third conclusion was that Culturally Responsive School Leaders focused their time, talents, and treasures on liberating, centering, and championing the Black students, families, and communities they served by concentrating on their school leadership interactions with their staff. In response to the connection that Culturally Responsive School Leaders had built with families, they sought to adapt the school environment to fit the needs and desires and Black students, families, and communities. When necessary, this included moving mountains to create

school cultures that supported professional development for staff members committed to Black students' success. But their focus on Black Educational Thriving also meant that they had a responsibility to confront and, if necessary, remove those staff members who maintained deficit mentalities about their students and posed an educational, moral, or spiritual threat to the healthy development of the Black mind. These three conclusions will be expanded in this chapter, and the implications they proposed for educational practice and policy will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of this study will be presented, along with some final thoughts.

Emergence

> *[In high school] I decided I wanted to become a teacher, specifically…a middle school teacher for my cousin. I saw that things got off track in middle school. So I said, I wanted…[to] be a middle school teacher [so that] I could give students like my cousin, the support that they need.* - Participant 2

Participant 2's story reflects many others in this study who knew at a young age that they wanted to be an educator. Their childhood experiences, living and learning with family created a desire that would be the driving force; their north star for their entire lives; a call that they spend their lives responding to. This call operated similar to Bourdieu's concept of habitus—the structuring structure, shaped by one's upbringing and educational experiences and shaping one's present and future practices in systemic and often predictable manners (Bourdieu, 1977). For Participant 2, the disparity between her educational experiences and those of her cousin called her to education; from that moment forward, she walked toward that call. As she continued toward the call, each step she took from high school to college, to teacher, to teacher leader, to school administrator caused her to emerge as a Culturally Responsive School Leader.

This concept of emergence was pulled from Robert Terry's 1975 book *For White's Only*. In this text, when discussing the racism of White liberals who maintain influential roles in Black spaces, Terry counters their existence by stating, "The goal is to enable indigenous Black leadership to *emerge* and direct the future of that community." Here, Terry juxtaposed indigenous with colonialized leadership. More importantly, he highlighted the role leaders embedded in dominant culture and traditional educational institutions perform in promoting Black Educational Thriving— retreating. They should remove themselves from positions of influence and leadership so that the leaders in and of those communities can do the work that needs to be done.

To accentuate this point, participants in this study shared their perceptions of being un-prepared for their work as school leaders, despite extensive training in school leadership through traditional educational administration programs and alternative licensure programs. When asked what prepared them for school leadership, they rarely discussed teacher education coursework or administrative licensure programs. Instead, they talked about their families, childhoods, and on-the-job experiences. They spoke about their connections to their lives and how those connections served their students, families, and communities. They were intuitively aware that becoming a Culturally Responsive School Leader did not happen in the classroom, nor was the title given after the completion of specific programs; instead, Culturally Responsive School Leadership began as a child, evolved throughout each participant's life, and in many ways continues to evolve.

However, when Culturally Responsive School Leadership is institutionalized, it ceases to be Culturally Responsive because the source from which Culturally Responsive

School Leaders derive their service to and for Black students, families, and communities is the Black students, families, and communities, not the classroom nor the textbook. Gloria Ladson-Billings echoes this sentiment when referring to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In response to a teacher complaining about not knowing how to do Cultural Relevant Pedagogy, she resounded, "Even if we could tell you how to do it, I would not want us to tell you how to do it" (Ladson-Billings, 2006). What Ladson-Billings suggested, and what the participants in this study demonstrated, is that doing Culturally Responsive School Leadership flows *only* from being a Culturally Responsive School Leader and attempting to train or teach individuals who are not Culturally Responsive to do the work occasionally considered Culturally Responsive would be catastrophic. Consequently, it is of critical importance to educational practitioners and policy initiators that Culturally Responsive School Leadership occupies spaces beyond traditional educational programs least it ceases to be Culturally Responsive.

Although this concept of emergence was capitalized by Robert Terry's goal centered on the emergence of indigenous Black leaders, the concept of emergence requires nuance and the ability of Black spaces to lift non-Black leaders. Terry's plan did not adequately allow for this. The participants' narratives provided this nuance. Four of the twelve participants in this study were non-Black, but Black and White educators identified them as Culturally Responsive. While the emergence of Culturally Responsive School Leaders is essential for Black Educational Thriving, professional racism by preventing non-Black school administrators from serving predominately Black institutions is not (Gay, 2000). Yes, Black students, families, and communities need more Black school leaders, but "presuming that membership in an ethnic group is necessary or

sufficient" for Black Educational Thriving is ludicrous, fallacious, and dangerous. Khalifa (2014) highlighted Black school leaders who "assume[d] typical White supremacist notions, positionalities, or treatments of Black students," distanced themselves from Black children and treated them more harshly than non-Black students while reinforcing and reproducing school cultures where Black youth merely survived. Therefore, the emergence of Culturally Responsive School Leaders required signifiers to Black students, families, and communities that the school leader is an ally and advocate for Black Educational Thriving.

In 2016, *Black Twitter* erupted with the conversation centered on the essential question: Which non-Black people are invited to the cookout. The "Cookout" is a symbolic representation of a Black space where Black folx are free to let down their guard and be themselves. Black Twitter, writes journalist and author Donovan X Ramsey, is "a force…A large network of black Twitter users and their loosely coordinated interactions, many of which accumulate into trending topics due to the network's size, interconnectedness, and unique activity" (Ramsey, 2015). Therefore, when Black Twitter opened the debate floor to discuss which non-Black individuals would be invited into Black safe spaces, Black folx, a group traditionally excluded and disenfranchised, created an inclusive space whereby outsiders required permission to access. This process is mirrored in school communities when Black students, families, and communities allow certain school leaders access to their communal safe space where they may connect with them in ways not seen since forced integration due to *Brown v Board of Education.*

To obtain access to the safe spaces of Black students, families, and communities, Culturally Responsive School Leaders needed to signify that they could be trusted by the

Black community and that they were committed to Black Educational Thriving and the liberation, centering, and championing of Black students.

For many Black participants, signifying this commitment to Black Educational Thriving proceeded naturally from their own educational experiences, families, and the racial match between them and the communities they served. However, while the Black Culturally Responsive School Leaders' racial homogeneity with their students heightened their ability to signify a commitment to Black students, the cultural mismatch due to social class and neighborhood differences between them and the Black community would never permit them access to the Black Safe spaces. Ironically, Black Culturally Responsive School Leaders did not seek to overcome this mismatch. Instead, they vulnerably struggled with its existence. Three Black Culturally Responsive School Leaders explicitly acknowledged their departure from the communities their students inhabited and the gap between their new community's cultures and the cultures of their students and their families' Black hyper-ghettoized urban communities. Paradoxically, the vulnerable struggle with this gap signified to the Black community that the Black school leader could be trusted in Black safe spaces.

For non-Black participants, this process of signifying a commitment to Black Educational Thriving was more difficult as they often shared racial identity markers with the oppressors of Black communities. Therefore, while Black school leaders only had to overcome the cultural mismatch between them and the students they served, non-Black school leaders had to over racial and cultural mismatch. Three of the non-Black Culturally Responsive School Leaders in this study responded to cultural mismatch by moving into the urban communities their students inhabited, albeit on the fringes of the

community where the urban and suburban lines were blurred. Non-White school leaders performed this relocation to distance themselves from non-Black communities, cultures, and ways of life and commit to Black Thriving by submerging (perhaps more accurately described as tiptoeing) themselves into Black communities and Black culture.

While relocation sought to address the cultural mismatch non-Black school leaders had with the Black communities they served, access to Black safe spaces would also require them to address the racial mismatch. Similar to how Black school leaders vulnerably struggled with cultural mismatch, non-Black school leaders vulnerably struggled with racial mismatch. They did not seek access to Black safe spaces but instead sought to understand why Black communities needed Black safe spaces. This inquiry process led the non-Black school leader to a critical understanding and explicit articulation of their non-Black identity. For the participants in this study, their non-Black identity was White. Therefore, they acknowledged their Whiteness and refused to allow it to oppress Black communities or narrate the Black educational experience. These White Culturally Responsive School Leaders understood that the Black disposition to public education resulted from Black Generational Educational Neglect, slavery, and racism, and not a reflection of the Black folx themselves. As they vulnerably engaged with their Whiteness, they unknowingly and unintentionally signified to the Black community that they were worthy of trust and were granted access to the Black safe spaces within the hyper-ghettoized urban communities their students inhabited.

This cultural and racial community connection is similar to Cultural Status Positioning. Carter's (1974) description of Cultural Status Positioning explains how even the oppositional beliefs of and negative expectations for Black students, families, and

communities became symbols of Black self-esteem and self-worth. Black folx created pride in being excluded. They created cultural capital in the absence of it. They took the worse that American slavery, racism, and oppression had given them, fashioned their tools, and built their own house. Unfortunately, however, due to *Brown v. Board of Education,* even though they had made their own house, Black folx no longer had their own schools, curriculum, pedagogy, or academic pathway to success. They would be and still are forced to connect with public education, a connection that has long served to maintain the racist social stratification of society.

The emergence of Culturally Responsive School Leaders, as opposed to their development, implies that careers in education are best broached at younger ages while their families, communities, and cultures significantly shape children and youth. At this age, the possibilities of the future education of Black students living in hyper-ghettoized urban communities can guide students without traditional institutional pressures and indoctrinations of what schools and educational leadership can and should resemble. Simultaneously, efforts should be made to promote, legitimize, and incentivize alternative pathways into education and educational leadership. If Culturally Responsive School Leaders emerge from their respective communities, less effort must be put into creating them. District and State educational agencies must be equipped with the skills to correctly identify the emergence and remove barriers that may prevent those who are Culturally Responsive from assuming positions within School Leadership.

Conversely, emergence suggests a "hands-off" approach to school leadership that may promote maintaining the status quo. However, future research should also engage the tension between ending the perpetuation of harm that prevents the emergence of

school leaders and an inauthentic and externally led development of the emerging school leaders. This does not mean that educational institutions are not responsible for ensuring the emergence of Culturally Responsive School Leaders. Educational Institutions have the immense responsibility to create Culturally Responsive Environments, environments from which Culturally Responsive School Leaders would emerge. Yet, they do not develop Culturally Responsive School Leaders.

The next section of this chapter will delve into the connection that Culturally Responsive School Leaders made with the Black students and families they served once they were granted access to communal Black safe spaces and how this connection would catalyze the brokerage of new Black safe spaces and the Black Educational Thriving therein.

Connection

> *He was one of those kids that was smarter than his parents already, but he didn't have anybody to talk to in the world of academia…I always say this about him. He could have been a Harvard grad, but he was born to a community college… I used to blame parents for stuff too. You know, like their parents not doing what they need to do, or, you know, he has a bad mother or whatever, but then loving him made me love his mother and appreciate her and help her and understand where she came from and where they were living and what was happening. It changed my whole life and ideas.* - Participant 8

While the previous section explained how participants spent their entire lives becoming Culturally Responsive School Leaders and obtaining the necessary signifiers to connect with Black communities, this section highlights the opportunity Culturally Responsive School Leaders experienced to connect with Black families and children in Black spaces codified by transparency, trust, and vulnerability. Although it was uncertain whether participants understood the gravity of their access to communal Black safe spaces, they always talked about their students and their families with compassion and

respect. Participant 8's excerpt above highlights that compassion and respect. Although they recalled blaming the student's mother for his educational experiences, they now shared an understanding of that student and his family that had evolved due to the connection they developed with them. This transition from victim-blaming to compassionate acceptance due to connecting with families and children captured a critical phase of the emergence of Culturally Responsive School Leaders.

Brene Brown, a sociologist from the University of Houston, defined connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued" (Brown, 2010, p. 182). She explained how connection allows individuals to give and receive without feeling judged. Participants in this study were critically attuned to how Traditional educational institutions regarded black families as apathetic and unmotivated regarding education. They were also aware of their students' and families' hope, strength, and resilience in the face of educational racism and discrimination. Culturally Responsive School Leaders connect with their students and families without pretense, ulterior motives, or intentions. They saw their families for who they were, not who society portrayed them to be. They listened to their families without interference, families who trusted that they were doing the best they could and sent to school the best they had. Finally, they valued Black families and students without judgment or comparison to White middle-class norms or expectations.

In light of the generations of educational neglect, Black families have been responsible for protecting themselves, their communities, and most importantly, their children from educational malpractice. They certainly could not afford to share their stories with those unworthy or undeserving least vulnerably they are used against them.

So, they erected cultural boundaries and sites where only those appropriately vetted could obtain access and authentically connect with them. This section briefly discussed this connection.

Connecting with Black students, families, and communities must happen organically; and intimate, private endeavor enacted by individuals who are committed to Black Educational Thriving and willing to do whatever work is necessary because they are critically aware of the history of Black folx in education and the need for authentic connections. Unfortunately, the practical implications for connection are as cautionary as the implications for the emergence of Culturally Responsive School Leaders. Courses and books should not teach individuals how to connect with minoritized cultures, communities, and people. Even Bourdieu (1986) cautions against this practice when he asserts that the profits and solidarity that form cultural capital are not consciously pursued and that their conscious pursuit threatens minoritized groups. Minoritized groups are vulnerable enough and have few safe spaces where they can be seen, heard, and valued without judgment; they provide tips, strategies, or assistance for accessing their intimate and safe spaces to individuals with ulterior motives or ill-intentions would be as dangerous. Individuals seeking to access and connect with minoritized cultures, communities, and people must go directly to the minoritized to do so. There must be no shortcut, course, or certification. In fact, those seeking access to communal Black safe spaces without having earned trust communicate to minoritize communities that these individuals are undeserving of the access and are not to be trusted.

Regarding policy, Black communities, families, and students must continue to be liberated and also be provided with the protection of their choosing so that they can have

the opportunity to grow stronger and more independent. It was critical to say protection "of their choosing" because protection allows for the dominant culture, those beyond Black safe spaces, to define and make decisions for Black families, communities, and students that are more harmful than beneficial. Yosso et al. (2001) reminded us of the need to listen to traditionally marginalized and oppressed voices when they discussed the importance of storytelling and Counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling tells the stories of those individuals whose stories are not often told and allows their perspectives to be centered and valued. One mechanism of protecting, centering, and valuing Black communities, families, and students is the increase of funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the development of high school pipeline programs that explicitly uplift and promote Black Educational Thriving as part of their mission and vision statements.

Additionally, institutions must permit and encourage the development of gatekeeping agents for Black safe spaces. Ironically, while I strongly oppose the existence of gatekeeping agents for hegemonic institutions structured by and for dominant cultures maintaining the currently stratified society, minoritized cultures and communities desperately need gatekeeping agents to protect their communal safe spaces. In fact, Black and non-Black individuals gatekeeping communal Black safe spaces create a stout level of protection for communal Black safe spaces should they choose to retain them.

Protecting communal Black safe spaces also mean that educators who attack or harm the Black body or mind must be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law because Black children as the weakest members of Black communities and families,

deserving of the greatest defense. To quote Malcolm X, “If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there is no progress. If you pull it all the way out, that’s not progress. Progress is healing the wound that the blow made” (Jackson & Shabazz, 2021, p. 148), we must never accept that our educational system allows anything except the removal of the proverbial knife out of the back of Black children, families, and communities, for only once the knife has been removed can healing and rectification occur.

Rectification

> *And so it's a system…we have a history of having bad experiences with school, our connection is different. You know, you have parents who are less engaged; you have students who are less engaged because their parents are less engaged. They don't care. You know, so all of those things are systemic issues that have to be corrected, you know. We can't just move forward and say, Oh, we're going to make sure this generation is cool. No, you have to repair that relationship with those previous generations.*
> - Participant 9

While admission into the safe spaces of groups for which one is not a member is only facilitated by signifying the same complementary or supportive ideas, beliefs, and actions, one’s admission is quickly revoked and canceled in the presence of criticism, critique, or correction. Such behaviors signify to the group that the individual is unworthy of trust and is no longer safe. The only individuals permitted to criticize, critique, or correct are in-group members or those members who have been within the safe space long enough for their allegiance to the group to outweigh their apparent opposition. However, even then, both in-group members and longstanding out-group members become vulnerable to ex-communication at the hint of opposition. Culturally Responsive School Leaders often find themselves in such spaces. They have two options if they wish

to remain connected to the students, families, and communities they serve: support or silence.

Conversely, Culturally Responsive School Leaders occupy positions within institutions that have historically marginalized, dehumanized, and oppressed the students, families, and communities they serve. They lead institutions that have created the conditions from which Black folx seek safety, and once admitted into the safe spaces of the Black community, they have a responsibility to protect these spaces and expand them. In doing so, they may be asked to become a type of Gatekeeper to communal Black safe spaces and Brokers expanding the boundaries of said Black safe spaces within their institutional spaces so that Black Educational Thriving may manifest. At other times, Culturally Responsive School Leaders are called upon to reinforce the boundaries of communal Black safe spaces to ensure that the ground is not lost. They are operating on the border of communal Black safe spaces while being moved to expand Black safe spaces requires Culturally Responsive School Leaders to critically maneuver in ways that do not betray the trust they have been given by the Black communities they serve while simultaneously not provoking the institution from expelling them from its ranks to initiating change. This maneuverability of school leaders to respond to the Miseducation of Black Youth while maintaining their employment in educational institutions cemented their identity as Culturally Responsive School Leaders.

In the wake of George Floyd's murder and the onslaught of Covid-19 on American cities, especially hyper-ghettoized urban communities, well-meaning People of Color and White people aimed at repairing the relationship between them that had been reduced to oppression, degradation, and a fight for equality. Participant 9 focused on this.

However, Participant 9 was also familiar with the history of Black folx in America and how Black folx wrestled with the intentions in public education, especially concerning *Brown v. Board of Education.* He explained said, "We were fighting for integration. We were fighting to be integrated into the schools that were designed for kids who didn't look like us." Participant 9 saw the American Educational System not as broken, needing repair, or sick, needing a cure, but as a historically racist system still oppressing, degrading, and disenfranchising Black students, families, and communities because that was what it was created to do. This assertion means the American Educational System is incompatible with repair; it must be rectified.

Participant 9 suggests that rectification is what the American Educational System needs. Repair, presumes that there was a previous condition for which the system needs to return— a condition in which Black children, families, and communities felt seen, heard, and valued— and seeks to return there. This is not the case for Participant 9. Instead, rectification seeks only to make what is present right. This process of rectifying the American Public Educational system is where Culturally Responsive School Leaders perpetually find themselves.

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar describes this relational space in which Culturally Responsive School Leaders perpetually exist with his notion of Institutional Agency. Institutional Agents "occupy one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1075) and manifest institutional agency when they act on behalf of an adolescent within their social network "to directly transmit, or negotiation the transmission of, highly valued resources" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1075). He suggests that institutional agents strategically supply lower-status individuals

with institutional resources to elevate them upwards in the stratified society. When institutional agents do this, they become Empowerment Agents. However, as the term empowerment implies, empowerment proposes the "work" to be done primarily on, with, and to the oppressed, not the oppressor. Here is where Stanton-Salazar's theory of Institutional and Empowerment Agent obtains clarity— in the narratives of Culturally Responsive School Leaders.

Although the participants in this study spent every day working with students when they described the roles and responsibilities they performed, they consistently engaged and countered the educational system; they held teachers accountable, they supported and encouraged their staff, and they created institutional systems of support, the modified schedules and implemented new curriculums, and they challenged their supervisors. Although they held titles that suggested they worked for institutions, they were double agents whose roles and responsibilities declared that they worked for the communities. In this way, the theory of institutional agents conflicts with the lived experiences of Culturally Responsive School Leaders. Their leadership actions were initiated from the connections and directions they got from students' families and their community but never against them, establishing their identity as community agents. Culturally Responsive School Leaders were not working *on* the oppressed. They did not consider the work to be done about providing resources to those occupying the lower rungs of society; instead, they worked tirelessly to change society by changing their institutions. They utilized their statuses and authority within institutions to rectify them.

The implications for rectification are arguably the most complex implications of this study as they engage the concept of institutional change within a conservative,

culture propagating institution most resistant to change. Therefore, just as Black communities need safe spaces for which to exist, communal spaces protected by those within and beyond the group, Culturally Responsive School Leaders require that same level of protection. Their work renders them vulnerable to being silenced or job loss, but they are essential to Black Educational Thriving and must be protected. When considering the support that Culturally Responsive School Leaders offer to Culturally Responsive Teachers, a potential source of protection for Culturally Responsive Schools can be found at the district, state, and national levels when institutional leaders are culturally responsive. Future studies could provide valuable insights into the existence and methodologies of district, state, and national leaders who are Culturally Responsive to the communities they serve.

Another question that arises in consideration of protecting Culturally Responsive School Leaders is: *How can they be protected?* In the foreword to Glenn Singleton's *Courageous Conversations about* Race, Gloria Ladson-Billings highlights Americans' belief in talking our way to solutions (Singleton, 2015). In Michael Sandel's *Justice: What's the Right Thing to do* (2009), he concludes that we need:

> A more robust and engaged civic life than the one to which we've become accustomed. In recent decades, we've come to assume that respecting our fellow citizens' moral and religious convictions means ignoring them (for political purposes, at least), leaving them undisturbed, and conducting our public life – insofar as possible – without reference to them. But this stance of avoidance can make for a spurious respect. Often, it means suppressing moral disagreement rather than actually avoiding it. This can provoke backlash and resentment. It can also make for an impoverished public discourse, lurching from one news cycle to the next, preoccupied with the scandalous, the sensational, and the trivial. (p. 268)

We must protect Culturally Responsive School Leaders by focusing on the problem Culturally Responsive School Leaders seek to eliminate—The Miseducation of Black

Youth, not the School Leaders themselves. We must talk about it and, most importantly, listen to others speak about it; we must engage in public and civil discourse about it- Black and White, urban, suburban and Rural, School Leaders, Teachers, parents, students, community members, and leaders, impoverished, wealthy, and middle-class, community and business organizations. In many ways, there is a significant caution regarding the Educational Institution, the Education of the Black Youth, and the policies that undergird them. However, if there has ever been a glimmer of hope, it has been found in the hope of a free and appropriate education to light the path to renewed Black Thriving and Success.

Limitations

Several limitations arose throughout this study that should be investigated and addressed in future studies. The first limitation is that while I possessed a working definition of Culturally Responsive School Leadership, District Leaders and other School Leaders were not asked to critically evaluate to what degree a participant aligned with the definition of a Culturally Responsive School Leader. This could have led to the group of participants in this study being more or less Culturally Responsive. One method of addressing this limitation in future research is to require participants to be identified by multiple colleagues and supervisors to improve the trustworthiness of the participating group

The second limitation was the inter-connectedness of the participants. While the request for referrals went out to all district leaders, most of the referrals originated from certain district leaders with a particular lens on Culturally Responsive School Leaders, so many participants shared similar qualities, such as being involved in the same district-

sponsored Principal Preparation Pipeline and shared racial demographics. These similarities could have led to a participant group that was more homogeneous than if stratified sampling methods had been used to obtain a pool of more diverse participants.

The third limitation of this study was the level of the researcher's positionality. At the time of this study, I was a colleague of each participant, and we are still collaborators and co-laborers in Urban Education. This connection to the work of Urban Education and these colleagues promoted a level of "in-group" affiliation that occasionally led the researcher to assume the meaning and relevance of specific responses instead of asking the participant to decode them.

Summary

This study set out to explore the development of Culturally Responsive School Leaders in urban schools located in hyper-ghettoized urban communities. Centering on the stories of participants who their peers identified as being Culturally Responsive, this study investigated the manners in which participants narrated their leadership journeys. The study revealed that Culturally Responsive School Leaders are not made; they *emerge* from their communities and experiences throughout their lifetimes. The study also examined how participants thought about cultural capital and found that Culturally Responsive School Leaders do not engage with traditionally structured cultural capital in dominant cultures; instead, they *connect* with the parents and students they serve and are moved to protect and expand the safe spaces they inhabit. Finally, this study sought an understanding of the roles and responsibilities assumed by the participants and found that Culturally Responsive School Leaders directed their work toward rectifying the educational institution. These three significant concepts— emergence, connection, and

rectification— formed the foundation of Culturally Responsive School Leadership development. Still, they also elevated the life, identity, and work of Culturally Responsive School Leadership to esoteric levels incapable of institutionalization, vulnerable to faux penetration, and bound to action.

At a time in our nation's history when states are seeking to reimagine equitable public education, this study suggests Culturally Responsive School Leaders have emerged, are emerging, and will continue to rectify decades of institutional trauma and promote Black Educational Thriving.

These three significant concepts—emergence, connection, and rectification- align with the aspects of Culturally Responsive School Leadership described above- an ethic of care, critical consciousness, high expectations, and leading change. Culturally Responsive School Leaders possess an ethic of care that students, families and communities perceive as genuine care, concern, and compassion (Noddings, 1992; Madhlangobe, 2009). This study's elevation of Connection highlighted this ethic of care. Another aspect of Culturally Responsive School Leadership was the quintessence of critical consciousness where participants were aware of and often interrogated their beliefs, values, and attitudes to constantly ensure they were promoting an anti-Racist educational experience for their students (Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gooden, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008). Critical consciousness was emphasized in this study in the concept of Emergence. Finally, leading change and high expectations were the final aspects of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership theory asserted in this study. Leading change refers to a school leader's propensity to recreate spaces where Black communities can be served by subverting White supremacy and eliminating its

strangle on minoritized students and communities (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012). High expectations, on the other hand, refer to the Culturally Responsive School Leader's capacity to demand excellence from their students while simultaneously elevating the support that students require to meet those expectations. These two aspects of Culturally Responsive School Leadership Theory were stressed in this study by the concept of Rectification.

Hence, while I began this dissertation by suggesting that it should not be read, I call upon all those committed to the anti-oppression and anti-racism of public schools located within hyper-ghettoized urban communities to read it and share it with those within their sphere of influence that is like-minded. Suppose we can spread these words fast enough and talk about them with courage and hope. In that case, we might be able to broker enough safe spaces for Culturally Responsive School Leaders to render any institutional adjustment against them powerless, thereby fortifying the Black Educational Thriving for generations to come.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

How do Culturally Responsive (Urban) School Leaders narrate their school leadership journey?

1. How did you become a school leader
2. How did you arrive in school leadership in Cleveland
3. Other leaders in the district have labeled you a Culturally Responsive school leader. What does it mean to be a Culturally Responsive school leader?
4. When did you realize that you were a Culturally Responsive school leader?

How do Culturally Responsive (Urban) School Leaders think about cultural capital in their often hyper-ghettoized urban communities?

1. Describe the culture of your students and the communities they live in?
2. How do their values and behavioral norms align with those of the school staff?
3. How do you obtain information about student, family and community cultures?
4. What happens in your school when student and community values and behavioral norms are different than those accepted and encourage by the school?
5. What role do you play in helping your school staff respond to these differences?
6. Describe a successful and unsuccessful student.
7. How did you come to identifying these students as successful and unsuccessful?
8. What happens to successful and unsuccessful students in your school?

How does the school leaders' journey to CRSL and the way they think about cultural capital contribute to their roles and responsibilities as school leaders?

9. What happens in your school, that is significantly different than what happens in schools not led by a Culturally Responsive school leader?
10. Describe your essential responsibilities as a school leader?
11. Are any of these beyond your official job description?
12. Tell me about a time when your responsibilities to students, staff, families, communities and other stakeholders were in conflict?
13. How did you navigate that space?
14. How has the Coronavirus pandemic affected the way you lead your school community?
15. How does your school interact with the local community?
16. When your school interacts with the local community, how race and racism impact those interactions- either explicitly or implicitly?
17. How has the current racial justice uprisings around the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Elijah McClain impacted the way you lead your school community?